

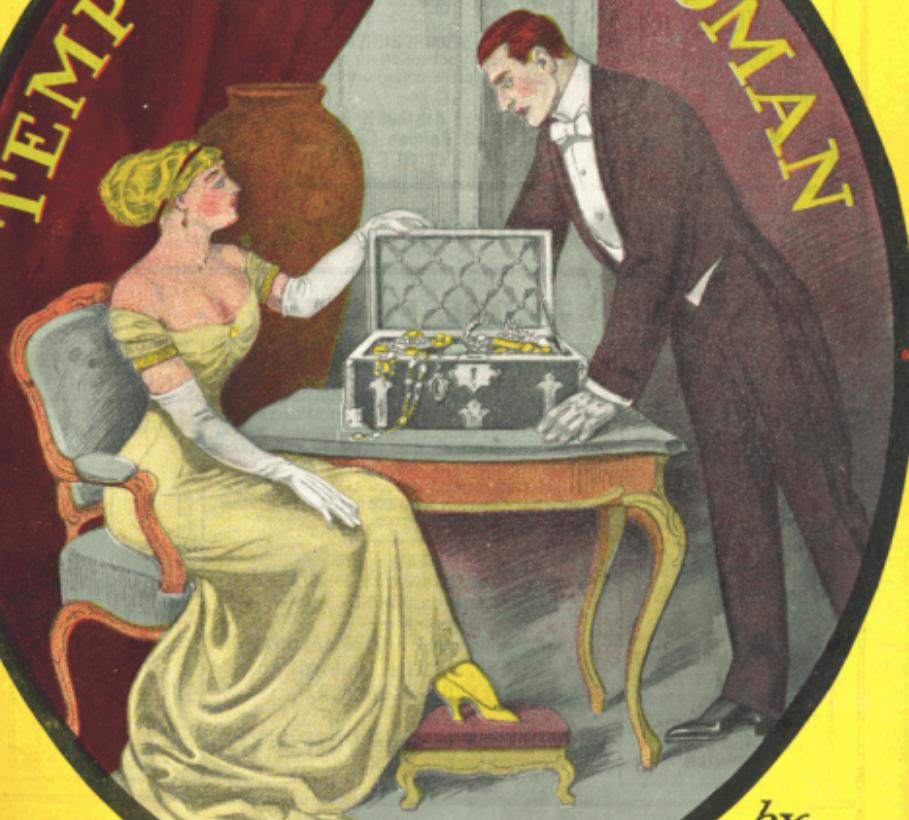


OLD SLEUTH WEEKLY

NO. 40

Price 5 cents

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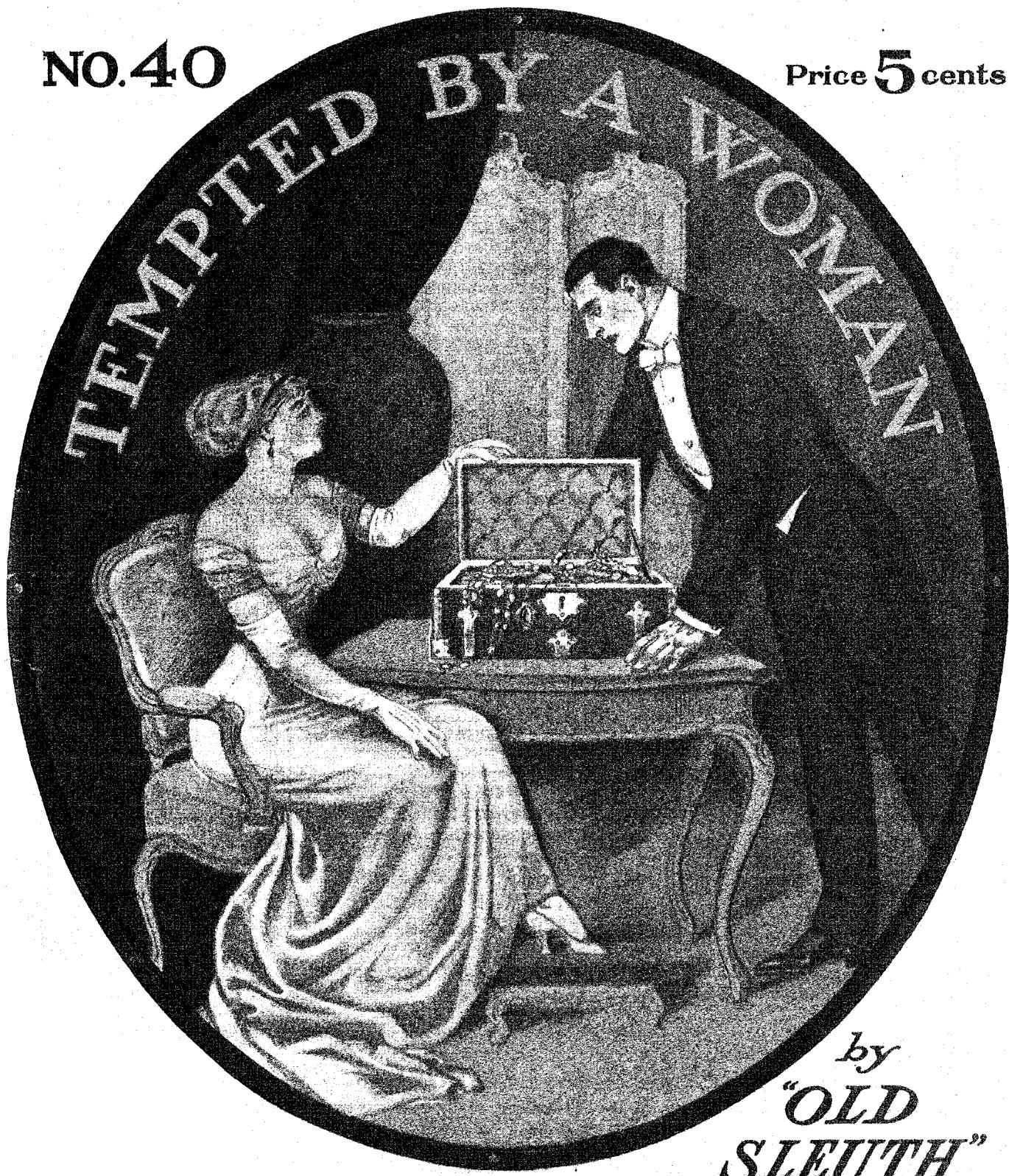
by
"OLD
SLEUTH"



OLD SLEUTH WEEKLY

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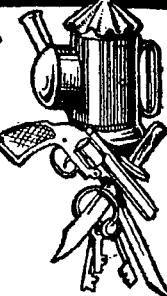
The Arthur Westbrook Company, Cleveland, U.S.A.



OLD SLEUTH WEEKLY

A Series of

THE MOST THRILLING DETECTIVE STORIES EVER PUBLISHED



No. 40.

THE ARTHUR WESTBROOK COMPANY, CLEVELAND, U. S. A.

Vol. I.

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TEMPTED BY A WOMAN

OR

The French Detective's Narrow Escape

By

"OLD SLEUTH."

CHAPTER I.

THE SIREN'S REQUEST.

"Kill that man and I will listen to you!" The words were spoken in a low tone; they fell from lovely lips, and a pair of beautiful eyes glowed with the fiercest malignity as the terrible condition was imposed.

A grand *faire* was in progress in one of the magnificent mansions located in one of the great, aristocratic up-town neighborhoods. Splendor prevailed on every hand, and the dresses and jewels worn upon the occasion would have done honor to the reception of an emperor.

The reception was given in honor of a young foreign lady who called herself simply Mme. Dubroski, but it was known that she was owner of a title, and was commonly called the "Princess."

Mme. Dubroski had resided in New York a year; she possessed magnificent jewels, retained a large retinue of servants, elegant equipages, and expended money with boundless extravagance. She was sought on every hand by the rich and famous, and appeared to be as happy as she was rich and beautiful; for, indeed, she was a lovely woman, not more than five-and-twenty, and she spoke English with the elegance and fluency of a native; also French, Italian, Spanish, and German.

Mme. Dubroski reigned a foreign queen in the best of American circles, when there appeared upon the scene another star who was much sought after.

M. Armand, claiming to be a Frenchman, arrived in New York, bringing letters of introduction to parties that immediately gained him the *entrée* into the highest circles; and, strangely enough, it was also whispered that he, too, was a gentleman of titled birth. He also spoke all the continental languages fluently, and besides, like the princess, was at home in the English tongue.

M. Armand, as he chose to call himself, was a man of five-and-thirty, possessed of delicate and classically cut features, magnificent eyes,

and manners that were simply charming, and he at once became exceedingly popular, not only with the ladies, but also with the gentlemen with whom he came in contact.

Mme. Dubroski heard of this wonderful Monte-Cristo, and, though disclaiming all acquaintance with him, expressed a warm desire to meet him; but, for some unaccountable reason, although moving in the same set, they had not met until the night when the princess uttered the words with which we open our narrative.

On the evening named the meeting took place. The introduction was formal, and but the usual words of courtesy passed between the Russian lady and the Frenchman; but a keen observer would have noted that, under the cold courtesy and formality attending the introduction, there were indications of tremor and suppressed excitement which, to say the least, were mysterious.

The princess appeared smiling and pleased, despite the fact that a startled look came to her eyes and a momentary pallor overspread her face.

M. Armand did not turn pale—indeed, his natural complexion was so white and marble-like that it would have been hard to detect the fact—but there came a fierce flash into his eyes; that was all; and only one person of all those present noticed the excitement attending recognition.

The festivities proceeded, and all the enjoyments of the occasion were entered into with the usual earnestness, and nothing unusual occurred until the moment when, as recorded, the murderous words fell from the lips of the Russian.

A young Englishman known as Everard Galt had been enslaved by Mme. Dubroski, and he was in constant attendance upon her, and made no secret of his admiration.

Everard Galt was another mysterious gentleman who was supposed to be doing America *incognito*. He was a man about thirty, large of stature and of powerful build, and seemed to have traveled all over the world and encountered adventures that cast into the shade the most startling conception of the novelist.

The festivities were nearly over, and Everard Galt and Mme. Dubroski wandered off into the conservatory where they were alone, of which the Englishman availed himself to urge his love, when the princess suddenly flashed a strange glance upon him and pronounced the words:

"Kill that man and I will listen to you!"

Everard Galt was mad with passion. He was the beautiful siren's slave, and unshocked by the terrible words, he asked in a low voice:

"Whom shall I kill?"

"That monster, Monsieur Armand!"

An instant's silence followed, and Everard Galt appeared to realize the strangeness of the request.

"Do you know him?" he asked, after a moment.

"Yes."

"He is your enemy?"

"He is my bitterest foe."

"Tell me the story."

"Not now."

"Are you in earnest? Do you mean that you wish me to kill him?"

"Yes."

"And if I do?"

"I will marry you."

Everard Galt turned pale.

"Listen," said the woman. "I know you, Everard Galt; I know you have noble blood in your veins, but there are several lives between you and the title. You are penniless; you are a swindler; you live on borrowed money; you have no prospects."

"Hold, Agatha! do not insult me because of my poverty."

"I do not wish to insult you. I love you. I care not that you are poor. I am rich—rich beyond all your calculations; but that man must die!"

Everard Galt was astonished. The beautiful Russian had spoken the truth—he was poor, and there were several lives between him and the title and estates; but he did not know that this lovely woman was aware of the facts. He had pretended to her that he was rich, and it was generally so understood, and she had never hint-

ed, until that moment, that she knew him previously, or was acquainted with any facts concerning his position and needs.

"Will you tell me how you chance to know so much concerning my affairs?"

"Not now; after that man is dead I will marry you, then I will tell you all; how I learned you were poor—how I became rich; and all my wealth shall be shared with you; but that man must die!"

"Does he hold a secret over you?"

"Ask me no questions, but mark my words: you become my friend or we become strangers; you must fulfill my conditions, or the chance shall be given to another; to my champion go my hand and my wealth."

"Fear not," said Galt, "Monsieur Armand shall die!"

CHAPTER II.

AGATHA DUBROSKI flashed one of her brilliant smiles upon the Englishman, and said:

"I knew you would be my champion."

"I must ask you one question."

"Do so quickly."

"Has this man, Armand, wronged you?"

The woman's eyes gleamed like fire, as she answered:

"He is a fiend! He would destroy me! He is here in America to kill me!"

"Why does he seek your life?"

"Can you not guess?"

And the siren again flashed one of her most alluring smiles upon her champion.

"Is Armand his real name?"

"No."

"Who is he?"

"I can not tell you; I only know he is my bitter enemy. He is here to destroy me."

"He has been in New York some months?"

"Yes."

"Had you not heard of Monsieur Armand before to-night?"

"Yes, but I did not recognize him under that name. The man is a fiend. He will stop at no crime to perpetrate his revenge upon me!"

"Did he recognize you to-night?"

"Certainly; and I am now satisfied he has known of my presence here, and that ever since his first arrival in New York, he has been upon my track. It is a wonder he has not made himself known sooner."

"His enmity to so beautiful a woman is strange."

"It is not strange! Wounded pride and jealousy would drive a man like him to commit any crime. He is a terrible man. Oh, how I tremble! I shall hardly dare eat or drink until I know that man is dead!"

"What will you fear?"

"Poison!"

"Why did you not seek a champion in Europe?"

"I would have spared him. I fled to America to save his life, but since he has followed me here, he must die! My life is precious to me, more precious, Everard, since I have met you!"

"You charmer! Is it really true that you so regard me?"

"You now know why I dared not give you an answer. I feared that man might appear at any moment."

"You need not fear; I will watch him, and I will guard you."

A moment the woman was silent, but at length she said:

"Are you a swordsman?"

"I flatter myself I have never met my master."

"Good!" ejaculated the siren. "Are you accustomed to the use of the pistol?"

"I am counted an excellent shot."

"Good! pistols are better! Monsieur Armand is a swordsman, but I do not believe he is an expert with the pistol."

"Of what are you thinking?"

"You can not murder him in cold blood; you must kill him as one gentleman kills another."

"You mean in a duel?"

"Yes."

"This is a bad climate for dueling; we are not in France."

"Yes, yes, I know; but they do fight duels here; they go to Canada, and, as the affair will occur between two foreigners, the law-officers will not be as particular as though the quarrel occurred between two Americans!"

"You are quite a diplomat."

"I was reared in the atmosphere of a court."

"Ah, I see; and now, Agatha, be happy; let

the smile return to your lips, the color to your cheek; you need not fear this man; you are safe! I count it but a small matter to rid you of the constant surveillance of this Frenchman."

"Do not go with too great confidence into this affair; you must not underrate your antagonist. Monsieur Armand is a wonderful man; you will need all your courage, strength, and address."

"I have fought with Zulus and with Arabs; I have struggled with men in all countries. Fear not; Monsieur Armand is a man whom I have no need to dread. I've been pitted against more formidable men."

At this moment the conversation was interrupted. A lady and gentleman entered the conservatory; the latter was M. Armand, whose life had just been bought by the Russian prince.

Everard Galt surveyed the Frenchman, and a contemptuous smile curled his lips. Armand was not a formidable-looking man. He was about five feet nine in height, of seemingly slender frame, and small limbs, and as Everard surveyed his own comparatively giant proportions, his contempt appeared justifiable.

Everard Galt, however, was destined to encounter a greater surprise, and that smile of contempt to be changed into a glance of amazement. He was to learn the greatest lesson of his life, and within a few hours.

The *fête* came to an end; the guests departed in due season, and all was gloom where an hour before all had been light and splendor.

Everard Galt accompanied Agatha in her carriage to her apartments. It was a privilege he had never enjoyed before. He expected to be dismissed at the door, but the fair siren invited him to enter. The lover was charmed; but he was more than charmed—he was dazzled and bewildered when shown into the rooms of the princess. He was accustomed to elegant apartments, but never, in all his life—not even in the palaces of kings or rajahs—had he beheld in one room so much of rare value and elegance. All quarters of the globe appeared to have contributed some article to the furnishing of that suite of rooms.

For a few moments the charmed man was left alone in the midst of all these splendors; but at length the princess joined him, and in her hand she brought two ebony cases bound and hinged in solid silver.

"I had reason," she said, "in asking you to come here at such an hour."

"I am not thinking of the reason, I am only enjoying the privilege."

"You have told me I was beautiful."

"And every one of these mirrors confirms my words."

"I am now about to let you discover that I am gifted in other ways than in mere personal beauty. I shall tell you what I know, so you will understand how observant I am and how unlikely to be deceived. I am, in fact, a female Monte Cristo. I was born, as it were, accomplished, and it is not egotism nor vanity that leads me to speak of these facts. I wish to assure you of the reward that awaits the success of your promise to remove from my path that monster, that vampire, Monsieur Armand. And when I term him a vampire, I do not speak metaphorically, but literally; the man once with gleaming eyes and blue lips told me he would yet drain off in a glass of wine my heart's blood. He told me no other deed would fully appease his vengeance."

"The man is indeed a fiend!"

"A fiend! He is what I say, a monster—a veritable vampire; but now listen to me. There are those who think and say I am an adventuress."

"I have never heard the suspicion breathed."

"No, no; but I have sought to learn what was thought and said of me. I had my reasons; indeed, it has been said that my appearance of the possession of great wealth was false; indeed, all has been said of me that suspicion and jealousy could suggest; but I care not; all I desire is to convince you that I am not an adventuress, but that I am, in fact, the richest woman in the world."

CHAPTER III.

EVERARD GALT's eyes glittered, and his cheeks flushed. He thought what would he not do to gain all that wealth and become possessed of the love of that beautiful woman. She was indeed a siren, and she did possess all that

was required to lead a weak man to crime and to doom.

"Everard," she said, "had we met under more auspicious circumstances I would have loved you. I will tell you only a part of my story. I will let you know the secret of my being the richest woman in the world, as I know I am. Yes, yes, I can spend millions of dollars each year, and still not trench upon the principal of my wealth; my wealth is boundless, and yet my youth, my wealth, my beauty, and your love, are nothing to me so long as that man, Monsieur Armand, is left to seek me out and destroy me. With him it is no idle threat. He means to kill me, and there is no escape for me unless he dies!"

"Fear not; he shall die! But you were to tell me the secret of your wealth."

"Yes. The tale is quickly told. My father was a poor nobleman, and he compelled me to marry a miser—a money-broker—a decrepit old man four times my age. A price was paid for me. My father knew my husband was rich, but had no idea of the real extent of his wealth. My husband had been lending money to kings and princes, and to dukes and lords, for over sixty years, at enormous rates of interest, and his accumulations, as I learned after I became his wife, were beyond all the dreams of a Rothschild. He lived but a year after our marriage, and all his wealth, which consisted principally of personal property, came to me, together with all the secrets of its biding. Yes, yes; I could buy a kingdom, and yet I am not happy because I have invited, unintentionally, the vengeance of this terrible Monsieur Armand."

"Who is Monsieur Armand?"

"I do not know. I met him in Rome, and I feared him from the start. He reminded me of men of whom I had read—terrible men, who, in their selfishness, would stop at nothing to accomplish an end. He was one of a party who made a visit to some ruins in the vicinity of Rome. We were detained until after dark, and this man, through an accident, became my especial escort, and from that moment I sought to avoid him, but he pursued me, as it were. I left Rome and proceeded to Florence, and, to avoid him, took up my residence at a pension frequented almost entirely by Americans, thinking he would not find me there; but—fancy my dismay!—upon the morning following my arrival he was my *vis-à-vis* at the table. I fled to Venice, and he followed me there. I proceeded to Paris, hoping that some crime might have banished him from the capital of France, but, alas! he followed me; and it was there he seized an opportunity to declare his love; and it was when I refused his proffered love, that he uttered the terrible threat against me."

"Poor hunted bird! how you must have suffered!"

"Yes, I did suffer, because that man gave me an insight into his scheme of vengeance. He circulated stories about me in Paris that caused all my friends to desert me, and the tales followed me, with him, to London, and then I fled to America. In New York I have lived in peace until to-night, when I saw that man, and it was then I knew that I could not escape him. There is no quarter of the globe where I can hide from him. I would not that he should die if I were assured that my own life were safe; but I am not safe! that man intends to murder me! I know it; and unless some one kills him, he will kill me."

"Agatha, he shall die!"

"Good! and over his coffin I become your wife, and to you I will give one half of all my wealth. We will return to England, buy a noble estate, and forget that such a wretch and monster as Monsieur Armand ever lived!"

"Your dream of happiness and security shall be carried out. Why, my dear Agatha, I could stamp out that man's life as I would stamp out the life of a spider!"

"Ah! again I warn you, do not underrate his powers. But do not fight him with swords. Force him to challenge you, so you shall have the choice of weapons, and then shoot him down! And now see here."

The strange woman touched a spring in one of the ebony boxes; the lid flew open, and a sight met the eyes of Everard Galt that caused him to utter an exclamation of amazement and wonder. There glittered before his eyes, with a brilliance almost blinding, a collection of gems whose value in money would almost purchase a whole ward in the city of New York.

The man gazed, with starting eyes and pale

free, while the temptress stood by, her eyes beaming with delight.

"See here!" she said, and she sprung the lid of the second box, and there fell under his gaze a collection, rivaling in number, brilliance, and value the first lot.

"These," said she, "are but a moiety of my wealth. I would cast these into the river and not miss them—forget that I ever owned them; and when Armand is dead half my wealth is yours, and if my love is precious to you, my love and hand go with the wealth."

Everard Galt was charmed and dazzled. He was indeed an adventurer. He had wandered the world over in search of wealth, and at the moment was hounded by creditors on every side; indeed, he was in a most critical position. He had represented himself as a man with a large income, and he had borrowed on every hand. He had run in debt in every direction, and it needed but one of his creditors to open upon him, when they would all come down on him and he would be compelled to flee, as he had often fled before, or be thrown into prison as a swindler for having obtained money under false pretenses. The illusion concerning his remittances from London once dispelled, and it would go hard with him.

"You are in financial trouble now?" said the siren.

"Frankly, I am."

"You have represented yourself as rich?"

"How know you all this?"

"Is it true?"

"Yes; it is true."

"And you expect at any moment exposure?"

"I do."

"You are safe; my love and friendship will save you. To-night, I give you a check for twenty thousand dollars. You deposit it with some banking-house, announce the receipt of your remittances and pay every dollar you owe."

"I can not accept this loan, Agatha."

"It is not a loan, it is a gift. You need not fear, you will never need money again. You shall astonish your friends in America; they shall vote you a prince. But Monsieur Armand must die!"

"Have I not promised?"

"Yes."

"Do you doubt my promise?"

"No."

"You need not fear; this monster shall be removed."

"No one must know that this check comes from me. I will make it a draft payable to A. B., or bearer. Send it by your valet, and I will be at the bank to identify him."

"Agatha, you are an angel!" exclaimed the lover.

CHAPTER IV.

UPON the following day Everard Galt's check was cashed, and the adventurer flourished around town a happy man; his hotel bills were paid, and all suspicion in that quarter allayed, and his borrowings of all his acquaintances were repaid. Indeed, his credit was so well established, that a week later he could have raised fifty thousand dollars, had he so desired.

Two days subsequent to the incidents we have described, the young man appeared at the apartments of the princess, but he failed in seeing her. He was informed that she had left town for a few days.

To the young man, his good fortune was a dream, but he did not understand the sudden and unexplained disappearance of the lovely woman who had come forward as his banker at such a critical moment. In the meantime he visited those places where he thought he would have the best chance for an encounter with the mysterious M. Armand.

Everard Galt had settled upon his plan of action. As by the laws of the duello the challenged party has the choice of weapons, he determined to provoke the Frenchman to be the aggressor.

One day they met; it was in a public restaurant. Galt had seen the Frenchman enter the place, and had followed him. M. Armand was in the company of several friends, and his enemy selected a seat at an adjoining table, and started off by fixing upon the Frenchman an insolent stare.

M. Armand paid no attention to the man's glance, although one of his companions had inquired:

"Who is that fellow?"

"Some idle chap, I reckon, who has nothing else to do than stare at his betters."

"No, no, there is a purpose in that man's actions."

"Very well, when he gets ready he will reveal his purpose, no doubt."

The Frenchman's party remained some time in the restaurant, and Galt maintained his position and his insolent stare, but M. Armand paid no attention to him.

At length the gentlemen rose and left the place. Galt followed them. The party were near the park, and entered and strolled along until they reached a secluded place near the lake, where they seated themselves upon a rustic bench, and a few moments later Galt appeared and took a position near them.

"There is that fellow again," said M. Armand's friend.

"Yes."

"Will you say now he is not purposely gazing at you?"

"It would appear so."

"I would not permit it."

The Frenchman smiled, and said in his quiet way:

"Don't be uneasy, the fellow will let himself out soon enough."

"Do you know him?"

"No."

"Do you recollect having ever seen him?"

"Yes; I met him at a reception."

"Did you have words with him?"

"I did not."

"Are you conscious of having given him offense?"

"No."

"But the man evidently is seeking to have you address him."

"He will have to wait."

"Will you permit me to inquire what he means?"

"No."

"Hang the fellow! I should like to duck him in the lake!"

"He may get there if you let him alone."

"It's strange what he can mean, but there is no doubt that he intends to annoy you."

"If that is his purpose, he fails. He does not annoy me in the least; I rather enjoy the man's attention."

The Frenchman spoke in a careless tone, but there was an undermeaning in his words.

"Suppose we move away and see if he follows?"

"Yes, he will follow us."

"And will you stand it?"

"Yes."

"Why?"

There was a peculiar smile in the Frenchman's face as he said:

"I don't wish to help him."

"Ah, I see you have an idea as to his motive."

"I can not help but recognize that he is following me, and, in good time, I will learn what it all means; but I shall not give him a chance to quarrel with me."

The friend walked away a short distance, leaving M. Armand seated on the rustic bench, and a moment after Everard Galt arose and approached the friend.

"You are in company with Monsieur Armand?"

"Yes, sir; I am in his company."

"Monsieur Armand was speaking of me a moment ago?"

"Was he?"

"Yes, sir."

"How do you know? Did you overhear what was said?"

"No, sir; but I judged from his manner."

"Then you were watching him closely?"

"Yes, sir."

"Your surveillance was very impudent."

"May I inquire what remark Monsieur Armand made concerning me?"

"Are you anxious to know?"

"Yes, sir, I am."

"His intention was called to your impudent stare, and he was asked if he knew you."

"And what did he say?"

"He said you were a stranger to him."

"Is that all he said?" demanded Galt, in a disappointed tone.

"No, that is not all he said."

"May I ask what other remarks he made?"

"Have you a right to ask?"

"I ask as a favor."

"Ah, well, let me see, he did remark that you were possibly some puppy who did not understand better manners."

"Ah, he called me a puppy?"

"That is as you take it!"

Galt started to walk toward M. Armand, when the latter's friend called:

"One moment, please."

"Sir!"

"Are you going to speak to Monsieur Armand?"

"Yes."

"You purpose to call him to an explanation for having called you a puppy?"

"Yes, sir."

"Well, if I remember right, he merely as-sented."

"What do you mean, sir?"

"It was I myself who called you a puppy, and Monsieur Armand merely joined in my opinion."

"That's sufficient!"

"But one moment; had you not better first ask an explanation from me?"

"I care nothing about you."

Galt turned and walked away. He approached M. Armand and said:

"Sir, you made an insulting remark concerning me."

"Did I?"

"Yes, sir."

"Did you hear me?"

"No, sir; but your friend has just informed me."

"Whatever my friend told you must be correct. He is a gentleman who delights in the truth."

"Then you do not deny it?"

"I deny nothing that has been said in my behalf by my friend."

A lively incident followed.

CHAPTER V.

EVERARD GALT, as he received the answer, hastily drew off one of his gloves, and, reaching forward, dealt M. Armand a blow on the cheek, and said:

"That is the way I treat fellows who comment upon my actions and appearance!"

M. Armand did not spring to his feet and knock his insulter down. He merely turned to his friend, who had himself risen from his seat, and said:

"I reckon he is satisfied now; go on with what you were telling me."

The Frenchman's other friend—he who had been Galt's informant—sprung forward, but was checked by M. Armand, who said:

"I pray you do the gentleman no violence."

Galt stood white and trembling, and, after a moment, said:

"Have I chastened an unresisting poltroon?"

"In good time you will hear from me, sir."

"Ah! I am to understand you are not a coward?"

"You shall be fully satisfied."

M. Armand's friends would have liked to resent the insult, American style, then and there; but both perceived that M. Armand was playing a part. They knew the gentleman, and permitted the affair to take its course.

Everard Galt slowly walked away, after having first tossed his card upon the knee of the man whom he had insulted.

M. Armand brushed the card to the ground, and continued talking to his friends as though nothing unusual had occurred.

That same evening Galt again called at the home of the beautiful princess, but was informed that she was out, and the man started to walk away. In going down Fifth Avenue he passed a mansion, and at the window beheld a handsome face which he recognized. They had told him the princess was out of town, but it was her face he recognized at the window.

"What does all this mean?" he muttered; "am I being 'played' by a beautiful woman? Is she avoiding me? Is she but using me as a common assassin? and are the twenty thousand dollars, after all, only blood-money?"

Galt walked up and down several times in front of the house, hoping to catch the eye of the Russian beauty. He intended, if possible, to let her know that he had seen her, and knew that the tale of her absence from the city was false.

The appearance at the window had been but momentary, and Agatha's face was not seen again, and at length the man walked away, muttering:

"She saw me, and to-morrow I will force my way into her apartments and learn what she means."

He returned to his hotel, expecting to meet a messenger from M. Armand, but no one had inquired for him.

"Is the man a poltroon, and does he mean to avoid me? Well, well, possibly it is for the best. I will see the Russian before I kill him. I will not permit myself to be made a fool of in this way."

Galt thought over his brief acquaintance with the fair siren, and as he was a man of pretty keen sense, his suspicions were aroused. He remembered that up to the evening of her meeting with M. Armand, she had treated him with disdain, bordering upon contempt; but immediately after that fateful meeting, she had suddenly developed a high regard for him; but with her regard came a condition—he was to murder a man in cold blood.

As he thought over her own wonderful story, it appeared to him as an improbable tale; why should a man conceive such a bitter hatred toward a woman, whose only offense was a rejection of his love?—and as M. Armand was evidently a man of the world, his action, as alleged, appeared improbable.

Galt remained at his hotel a long time, expecting that the messenger from M. Armand might come; but when it was well on toward midnight, he started forth, determined to walk awhile in front of the home of the princess, hoping by some chance to see her, or gain admission. He had gone but a short distance from the hotel, when he became an actor in quite a strange and startling adventure.

A handsome *coupé* was driven along in the street past him, when suddenly he heard a shrill scream from the interior of the carriage, and the next instant the door of the vehicle opened, and a lady sprung forth, followed by a man.

The lady screamed "help! help!" as the man caught hold of her.

Galt was a brave fellow, and, seeing a lady in trouble, he sprung forward to her assistance.

As he approached the woman appealed to him

"Save me! save me!"

"I will," he responded, and made an effort to grasp the pursuer, who immediately leaped back, and, upon seeing a stalwart man to the rescue, retreated, re-entered the *coupé*, which had halted a few feet away, and at once was driven off.

Galt turned his attention to the lady, who was elegantly dressed.

"Oh, save me! save me!" moaned the woman. "Madame, you are safe; the rascal has gone off."

"Oh, thanks, thanks! I owe my life to you!"

"No, no, madame; you had escaped him when I came to your assistance."

"But he would have dragged me back into the carriage."

As the woman spoke she removed her veil, and disclosed a handsome face.

"Can I be of any service to you?" demanded Galt.

"Has he really gone?" And the woman glanced around in a furtive manner.

"Yes, he has gone. Why did you escape from him?"

"Oh, it is a terrible tale!"

"Did he mean to harm you?"

"He would have killed me."

"Killed you?"

"Yes."

"Why?"

"Oh, sir, if I could only confide in you! I need some one to confide in, now it has gone so far."

"You can confide in me, madame."

"But you are a stranger."

"I am a gentleman."

"Still a stranger."

"But I can communicate with some of your friends for you."

"Alas! I have no friends in New York, or that man would not have dared to attempt to abduct me."

"Confide in me."

Galt was deeply interested. The woman was elegantly dressed, diamonds gleamed in her ears, and she was handsome. A moment she appeared to think, and at length said:

"I must confide in some one."

"Confide in me."

"Will you take me to my home?"

"Certainly, with pleasure."

"Please call it back; I will await you here."

As luck would have it, a hack was passing. Galt and the lady entered and were driven away, driven beyond the city limits; but the man did not observe the distance, he was so engrossed by the fascinating conversation of the lady. The carriage at length drove through a large gateway and halted in front of a handsome mansion.

"Ah! we are home," said the lady. They alighted and entered the house, where Everard Galt met with the most thrilling adventure of his life.

CHAPTER VI.

As Galt alighted from the carriage and ascended the grand steps leading to the mansion, he for the first time experienced a slight tinge of suspicion, and a feeling of misgiving flashed through his mind.

"Is this your home?" he asked.

"I abide here at present."

The man glanced around.

"This is a grand old place."

"Yes; at some future time I will take pleasure in showing you through the grounds; but will you enter now and listen to my story?"

"Yes, I will enter and listen to your story," he answered.

The woman did not ring a bell, but entered the house with a latch-key, and Galt was ushered into a broad hall and led up a winding pair of stairs.

The house was evidently the home of a man of wealth; paintings of great value adorned the walls, and exquisite pieces of statuary were placed in available places.

"I have fallen into good luck, I reckon," he mentally thought, as on every hand he recognized the many evidences of wealth.

The woman entered a room on the second floor, and the visitor found himself in an apartment furnished with Oriental magnificence.

"I will leave you here a few moments," said the beautiful and mysterious guide.

Again a suspicion flashed through the man's mind, and he was urged to say:

"Madame, this is all very strange and mysterious; and let me tell you, if treachery is intended, you had better beware!"

"Are you afraid of a woman, sir?"

"No; I am not afraid of a woman or a man."

"Will you await my return?"

"I will, since I have warned you."

The woman left the room, and fifteen minutes passed. Galt began to grow very uneasy; there was a sort of Frenchy coloring to his remarkable adventure, and an idea crossed his mind that some game was being played, and he determined that, in case the woman did not return in a few moments, he would quietly slip out of the house, and he muttered:

"I do not propose to be caught like a mouse in a trap, even though the bait is a beautiful woman."

Another ten minutes passed, and Galt started to go toward the door through which he had entered, but he found it locked. He had not seen the woman who guided him lock the door, nor later on had he heard a key turned in the lock.

"Well," he muttered, "this satisfies me that treachery is intended. I have been lured into a snare."

He felt for his weapons, and, to his amazement, discovered that his pistol was gone.

A pallor overspread his face, and he felt for his knife. That, too, had mysteriously disappeared, and no doubt remained that he had been made the subject of a trick. The woman was, beyond question, a decoy, and while in the carriage she had skillfully deprived him of his weapons. His position was not a pleasant one. He was in a strange house, possibly surrounded by thieves, and unarmed, at their mercy.

He stood revolving in his mind what he should do, when he heard his name called:

"Good-evening, Mr. Galt."

He turned quickly, and a cry of amazement fell from his lips. He stood in the presence of the mysterious M. Armand.

For an instant he was stricken dumb, and the two men stood and glared at each other. The silence was broken by M. Armand, who said:

"Were you trying to leave?"

Galt was not a coward. He was a cool, brave man, larger of stature than the Frenchman, and had he been armed, would not have experienced an instant's anxiety.

"So you are at the bottom of this trick?" said Galt.

"Do you call it a trick?"

"Seeing you here, I do."

"Well, it was a trick."

"Yes, sir; you took advantage of my better nature to inveigle me, in order to—"

"Save your life," interrupted M. Armand.

"To murder me, you mean?"

"I mean just what I say."

"Then why have I been disarmed?"

"As a precaution tending to your own safety." Galt smiled in a scornful manner, and answered:

"It does not look like saving a man's life when you rob him of all means for protecting himself."

"I will explain."

"Please do."

"Take a seat, sir."

"I prefer to stand."

"As you please. Listen: you are a man of the world, a man of hasty temper. If you had your weapons at this moment the chances are that ere this you would have made an attack upon me, and in order to save my own life, I would have been compelled to kill you."

"You appear very confident of your ability to kill me."

"Yes."

"You had a purpose in luring me to this house?"

"I had."

"What was your purpose?"

"I wished to save your life."

"I reserve the right to doubt your word."

"Why do you doubt my word?"

"We are enemies."

"You are mistaken, I am not your enemy."

"I have indicated that I am yours."

"Yes; you grossly insulted me to-day."

"I did."

"What was your purpose since we were strangers to each other?"

"I choose not to make any explanation."

"As you please; I will explain for you. It was your purpose to insult me, so that I would challenge you."

"I see I made a mistake."

"How?"

"I thought you were a gentleman, but I now know that you are a trickster."

"Listen one moment; if you are determined to fight with me, you shall do so!"

"When?"

"Now, and here!"

"I decline the honor; I do not propose to be murdered."

"You are as safe here as though you were in your native halls."

"I doubt it! When a man is inveigled into a house, he has every reason to doubt his safety."

"You have been duped, Mr. Galt."

"Ah! you admit it."

"Yes; you were duped when you were paid twenty thousand dollars to murder me! Please do not assume the virtuous air! You are a paid assassin!"

Galt turned all colors. Who was this mysterious man, who, in such an off-hand manner, declared a fact which should not be known to a living soul besides himself and one other?

"You do not deny my accusation, sir?"

"It is too gross to merit a denial!"

"My charge is true; you were warned to provoke me into a challenge, so the choice of weapons would remain to you; you would take my life, but, poor fool, mark me, I would save yours!"

CHAPTER VII.

"If I were a man of less experience, I might be deceived by your chaff," said Galt.

"What I say is true."

"Then you have my thanks for your good intentions, and I can protect myself. Will you please open that door and prove your sincerity by permitting me to depart?"

"One moment. You insulted me."

"I did."

"Your purpose was to provoke me to a challenge?"

"That was my purpose."

"Consider yourself challenged."

"What do you mean?"

"My words are plain. I challenge you to mortal combat for the insult you put upon me!"

"But I must receive a challenge in the usual form."

"I beg your pardon. You must remember we are in New York. The laws against dueling here are very stringent and severe. You knew that when you insulted me. You are a man of courage. All you desire is to murder me, under cover of a duel, in obedience to the request of the Circé who has employed you. We can fight now and here!"

"But I have no friend to act for me."

"Neither have I."

"Do you mean to say you are alone in this house?"

"I do."

"I know you are speaking falsely."

"What I say is true."

"Where is the woman who inveigled me here?"

"Gone to capture another gentleman whom I wish to interview to-night."

"And you say we can fight fairly here?"

"Yes."

"I have every reason to doubt your good faith, else why was I disarmed?"

"I told you once: in order to save your life."

"Why did you not challenge me in the usual way?"

"I did not wish to kill you."

"And yet you challenge me here?"

"Yes."

"Why have you adopted this expedient?"

"To save your life. And now, sir, as time is pressing, and I expect another victim to-night, we might as well get to work."

"I decline to fight you."

"Why?"

"The circumstances under which I am challenged are too unnatural and uncoventional."

"You must fight! You insulted me grossly, and I demand satisfaction!"

"I will meet you in the usual way, but I do not propose to be murdered."

"Nice talk to fall from the lips of a paid assassin! My friend, you will never have another chance to earn your money, and if you do not kill me, you can not wed the beautiful Madame Dubroski."

"I know of your hatred to that beautiful woman!"

"Do you?"

"Yes."

"You heard the story from her?"

"Yes."

"She told you how I threatened to eat her up as a delicate luncheon, but never mind, you must render me satisfaction; you insulted me in a most gross manner, and I propose to have the matter settled now and here!"

"I will not fight you, sir!"

"Oh, yes, you will."

"You can not compel me to do so!"

"Oh, yes, I can; see here!"

The Frenchman produced two dueling swords.

"I will not fight you!"

"Why not? are you a coward?"

"No; but I am aware that you have your friends concealed ready to come in and murder me should I get the advantage."

"I solemnly declare we are alone in this house."

"I am not bound to accept your word; the circumstances under which I was brought here justify my suspicions."

"The circumstances under which you insulted me justify any method I may adopt to resent it! you are a paid assassin! you did not insult me as one gentleman insults another! you merely provoked me in order to murder me and earn your money! and now, Everard Galt, you will fight me or I will kill you! Choose your weapon!"

"Do you swear it shall be a fair fight?"

"I do."

"Do you swear we shall not be interrupted?"

"I do."

"I am at your mercy. I am compelled to accept your word."

"You are at my mercy; you are indeed compelled to accept my word."

The Frenchman extended the handles of both weapons to Galt. The latter selected one of the weapons, and M. Armand said:

"Prove your steel."

Galt did prove his steel, and discovered that he handled a most excellent weapon.

"Now, sir, again take your choice; you shall have this one if you prefer it."

"This weapon will do."

"Then prepare yourself."

"One moment, Monsieur Armand. If you succeed—"

"Well?"

"Can I ask that my body be sent to my friends in London?"

"You have my promise that if you fall your remains will receive the same attention as though you were my own brother."

"Have you pen and paper near at hand?"

"I have."

"May I ask for a moment's indulgence?"

"You wish to make your will?"

"No; I wish to write an order conferring upon you, sir, the authority to take charge of all my effects."

"You will find pen, ink and paper, sir, in yonder table-drawer."

Galt had made up his mind that he was to be murdered. He did not believe that friends of his antagonist were not lying in wait, but he had taken a desperate resolution. He would kill M. Armand ere he fell a victim to the Frenchman's friends.

He wrote a letter, folded and sealed it, and said:

"You insist upon my fighting you?"

"I do."

"I ask one favor."

"Name it."

"I wish this note mailed."

"It shall be sent to the post."

"Now?"

"No."

"Why not?"

"There is no one to carry it, unless I go myself."

"You still declare we are alone in this house?"

"We are alone in this house."

"Then I must trust to your mailing the letter after my death."

"You are not dead yet; you may kill me."

"I have no hope of killing you. I have been inveigled here through treachery, and through treachery I expect to be murdered."

"If you were you would but meet your deserts, as you accepted pay to murder me in the most treacherous manner."

"I have not deemed it necessary to deny your charge."

"It would be useless for you to do so."

"I am at your mercy."

"No; if you prove the better swordsman, I am at yours. I know that you are an expert."

"There is nothing left for me but to trust to your honor; I must fight."

"You must fight—yes, sir; the combat is inevitable."

"I am ready."

CHAPTER VIII.

THEY were both men of experience and nerve, and they coolly prepared for the combat, and a few moments after Galt's announcement of his readiness, they faced each other with weapons poised.

We will not describe the various phases of the combat, but merely state that both speedily learned that they were evenly matched, and the chances hung upon powers of endurance or accident, seemingly; but as the combat progressed, it became evident that M. Armand was holding an advantage in reserve.

The men thrust and parried until at length, by mutual consent, a truce was called.

"You are satisfied now," said M. Armand, "that no treachery is intended?"

"I have increased respect for you, sir."

"You are a fine swordsman," said Armand.

"Thank you."

"You are sufficiently expert to know that twice I could have killed you."

Galt turned slightly pale. He was aware of two advantages that he had given the Frenchman, but he had thought the latter failed to avail himself of them through ignorance.

"When you are rested, sir, we will resume the combat. You know now that no treachery is intended, and when I kill you, you will know that you have had every fair advantage."

"Need this combat go on?" demanded Galt.

"Yes, sir; you have been paid to kill me; you insulted me in the grossest manner. I must be satisfied."

The combat was resumed, and M. Armand, who previously had remained entirely on the defensive, assumed the offensive, and it was then that Galt had discovered that he was overmatched; the smaller man displayed greater skill, strength, and endurance, and the Englishman realized that he was a doomed man. His courage, however, did not desert him. He was a man of unquestioned courage. He had faced death a dozen times; and the realization flashed across his mind that, after all, he was but meeting his deserts. He had been lured into acting a mean and despicable part, and it was but right that he should meet the penalty.

The combat waxed fast and furious, and at length Galt was disarmed. He was at the mercy of his more skillful antagonist. He stood to die, when M. Armand lowered his sword.

"Strike!" said Galt; "you have won."

The Frenchman smiled pleasantly and said:

"Did I not tell you I had inveigled you here to save your life? I am a man of my word, and after such a declaration I can not kill you."

"Then why did you fight me?"

"To save your life."

"You mystify me."

"Do I?"

"Yes."

"Shall I explain?"

"If you will."

"I fought you to prove to you that you could not kill me."

"You still mystify me."

"That woman would have sacrificed you!"

"Madame Dubroski!"

"Yes; she has led many a man to his death; the very glance of her eye is doom!"

"I do not understand."

"We will talk of her anon: at the sword practice I have proved myself the better man; shall we fight with pistols?"

"Why should we fight more?"

"You will then have another chance to earn your twenty thousand dollars!"

"Sir, I can not fight you!"

"Why not?"

"You gave me my life. I can not take yours!"

"Do you mean that?"

"I do."

"But when you go into the presence of that woman again, she will teach you to forget; she may lead you to attempt, as a secret assassin, what you have failed in accomplishing in open combat."

"She can never induce me to attempt your life! As bad a man as you are, as blood-thirsty as you are in seeking to kill a poor, helpless woman, you have disarmed me, and some other man must step forward as the champion of Madame Dubroski!"

"You say as bad as I am?"

"Yes."

"Do you know me to be a bad man?"

"Madame Dubroski has told me your history."

"And you would believe a woman who would promise to marry you as a reward for a cold-blooded murder?"

Galt turned pale.

"Can it be possible that she told me a false hood?"

"It would be strange if she told you the truth. What did she tell you?"

"I have no right to betray her confidence."

"Then I will tell you all that she told you," said M. Armand repeated word for word the tale Mme. Dubroski had related. Galt's eyes opened in wonder as he heard the story retold with most particular minuteness.

"See, I know what she told you, and I knew when you insulted me in the park why you had done so; and more, I put myself in your way so as to afford you an opportunity to insult me."

"This is all very strange. The story Madame told me is false?"

"Yes; her tale is false."

"What could be her motive?"

"She wished to lead you on to murder. When you had committed the crime she would have been the first to turn against you."

"Then the woman is really an evil Circe?"

"She is a very wicked woman. She is the most heartless siren who ever sought to lure a man on to ruin. Mark me, she showed you her wealth!"

"She did."

"She promised to marry you when the terrible Monsieur Armand was dead?"

"She did."

"But she has not permitted you to see her since she gave you the twenty thousand dollars?"

"She has not."

"She has pretended to be out of town?"

"Yes."

"And yet this very evening you discovered that you had been deceived; you saw her at a window in a mansion on Fifth Avenue."

"How do you know all this?" inquired Galt, with eyes distended with wonderment.

"It matters not how I know all this. My knowledge and what has occurred here ought to convince you that I tell the truth."

"But it is all so strange. Why should the woman select me as her agent?"

"Because she discovered that you were a man of desperate courage, and she learned, at the same time, that she had charmed you. She had thrown about you a spell that would give her the power to lead you on to accomplish her design."

"And what is her design?"

"Her first design is to murder me. She will then dispose of you very easily."

"She is a bad woman!"

"She is indeed a bad woman."
"And I have been duped by her?"
"Duped? yes. You might have sacrificed your life in her behalf."
"And who, sir, are you?"
"I am Monsieur Armand."

CHAPTER IX.

A MOMENTARY silence followed the question and answer as recorded at the close of our preceding chapter. The silence was broken at length by Galt, who said:

"There is a great mystery here."
"Yes; there is a great mystery."
"You know that I deliberately sought to quarrel with you in order to kill you at the request of that woman?"

"Yes."
"And yet when you hold my life in your hands you spare me?"

"Yes."
"You know that I have received money indirectly as an inducement to kill you?"

"Yes."
"And you spare me?"

"Yes."
"Why?"
"I know that at heart you are not a murderer. I know that you were under the spell of the most alluring siren on earth; and I had other reasons."

"What are your other reasons for sparing me?"

"In good time you shall learn why I spared you."

"Am I free to leave this house?"

"Yes."
"At once?"

"Yes."
"But are we not to have a further explanation?"

"Not necessarily."
"Will you not tell me who you are?"

"I am Monsieur Armand."

"Will you not tell me what relationship you bear to that woman, and why she seeks your life?"

"I can not tell you that now."

"And have you no inquiries to make concerning who I am?"

"I know all about you."

Galt gazed in wonder.

"You know all about me?"

"Yes."

"And you will not tell me concerning yourself?"

"Not at present."

"I owe my life to you."

"Well, yes. See here; it is as well that you should have an idea as to the risk you run with me. Watch!"

M. Armand stepped to the window and placed several small vials on a book. The corks in the vials were not larger than a three-cent piece.

"Please stand to one side," said the Frenchman, as he paced the room to its further end, and again called: "Keep your eye on the vials!"

A moment later there came a succession of reports—five in all—and as the smoke cleared away, M. Armand pointed to the vials. They had all been shot away—and the Frenchman had fired in rapid succession. The marksmanship was simply wonderful.

"Now, see here," said M. Armand, and he took five pieces of twine and knotted them, some in the center, others at different distances, and the strings he suspended from the half-raised window-sash, when again he paced to the further end of the room, and, turning a second time, rapidly discharged his revolver; and when the smoke cleared away, Galt discovered that every string had been severed by a bullet just where it had been knotted, and the knots were not larger than duck-shot.

"Sir you are the most wonderful marksman I ever beheld!"

"And yet the Russian princess bid you challenge me to a duel with pistols! had we fought with pistols, I would have been compelled to kill you; it was only with the sword that I was enabled to fight you and spare your life!"

"I am deeply indebted to you."

"Let me give you another exhibition."

M. Armand went to a fruit dish and tied two apples to separate strings. He then suspended the strings from the chandeliers so that the apples swung about one foot distant from each other.

"Now, sir, behold!" said he.

Galt watched and beheld a most marvelous

performance. M. Armand took a sword and made several flourishes, when suddenly, by a quick cut, he severed both strings, but ere the apples had reached the floor, by a forward and back cut both were sliced.

The performance was indeed wonderful, and Galt stood and gazed aghast. This was the man whom he had challenged to mortal combat.

"You now see," said M. Armand, "that I certainly did not desire to take your life."

"I am convinced, and as a man of the world

I have made another discovery."

"And what have you discovered, sir?"

"I have discovered that you had an object in sparing my life."

"Ah, you think so?"

"I do."

"Your supposition is correct."

"Will you make your purpose known to me?"

"I would make you my friend."

Galt turned pale, and for a moment was silent, but at length he said:

"You have a purpose in wishing to make me your friend?"

"Yes."

"Explain."

"I wish to use you to aid me in tracking this woman."

"Madame Dubroski?"

"Yes."

"I can not aid you."

"Why not?"

"I can not aid in the destruction of a woman."

"You love her?"

"That is a question I am not called upon to answer; but I will say that it would appear as though for some reason you are her enemy."

A strange smile played over the handsome countenance of M. Armand.

"I saved your life," he answered.

Galt was nettled, and answered:

"I have seen you shoot; I have been a witness to the display of your skill with the sword, but I am still prepared to fight you to the death. You can kill me, but I will never become a creature of your vengeance because you have spared my life."

"You sought the quarrel with me?"

"Yes."

"I would have been justified in killing you?"

"Yes."

"Yet I did not."

"But your mercy may have been the outcome of a sinister motive."

"No, sir; you are mistaken."

"Then why twit me of having spared my life?"

"I wish to convince you that I am indeed a merciful man."

"Well?"

"If I am a merciful man, I could not be cruel to a woman."

"You are a strange man, and have a strange way of illustrating your purposes; but will you please tell me just what you wish me to understand?"

"I wish you to understand that, had I wished to murder Madame Dubroski, I could have done so. I know where she lodges; I know where she visits; I know all her movements. I have proven to you that I can spare a life, and I now declare to you that I desire to spare the life of madame. Did I seek her life, I could make her my victim within an hour."

"I believe you."

"Then you may trust me. You may save her life—you may prevent a certain contingency that might cause her life to be in jeopardy."

"You still talk in riddles."

"Yes; and now I propose to throw off the mask."

"Do so."

"I could have arrested madame in France, in England, in Germany, in Italy, but I did not; I wished first to learn more concerning her career."

"Her story concerning you is false?"

"Yes, sir; false!"

"And you are a detective?"

A moment's silence followed, broken by M. Armand, who said, in a low tone:

"I am ——"

Upon hearing the name, a pallor overspread Galt's face.

CHAPTER X.

GALT extended his hand and said:

"The mystery is explained. I understand all."

"And I can count upon your assistance?"

"That is a question I can not answer until you have told me the history of madame, and explained to me your full purpose concerning her."

"Accident has made it possible for you to say me, and you are lucky that such is the case, for you serve me well your fortune is mine; but had you killed me you would have been undeserved as a reward."

"Is this woman a murderer?"

"She has a paid assassin in her employ. She is herself a Lucrezia Borgia."

"That beautiful woman a murderer?" ejaculated Galt.

"Yes."

"And you spare her life?"

"I would spare her life, and I would save her from taking life. Listen to me; I will tell you a strange story; and strangely enough the wonderful tale she told you is true, only in the reverses. She did marry a millionaire nobleman, while it was her own father who was not a money-lender but an Italian chemist; a man versed in all the subtleties of every known poison, and in his child he had an apt scholar; and in one branch of chemistry that beautiful woman whom you know as Madame Dubroski, is the greatest adept on earth. She could give you a poison that would cause your death one week after it had been administered, and during that week she could separate herself a thousand miles from her victim, and thus avoid the remotest suspicion of guilt. She possessed a secret for causing death which would baffle all the doctors in the world. Yes, yes, she is a dangerous woman, and yet I would save her life, I would spare her."

There was a sad look on M. Armand's face as he spoke, and a strange suspicion flashed through Galt's mind.

"Why would you spare a dangerous woman?"

"I will tell you. The woman was trained to be dangerous. She never was brought under good influences. Her father was a villain, and from infancy the child was taught to scheme and plan. Indeed, she was taught that there is no God; that the only virtue in life was success, and that any means were justifiable in obtaining it. And yet, with all, the woman has most excellent traits. The Bible says charity covers a multitude of sins; and this woman, this Italian adventuress, has performed some very noble acts. At heart she is a good woman; and could she once be taught the error of her early training, she would be noble and good."

"But you say she is a murderer?"

"I have no proof that she ever committed a murder, but I ought to know she sought to murder people. She has sought to murder me, and will seek to murder you."

"And yet you say she is good?"

"No; I only said she has good qualities, that her strange, weird training was an excuse for lack of knowledge of the difference between right and wrong. She is one of the strangest mixtures of humanity I ever met."

"She is very rich?" suggested Galt.

"Yes, she is very rich."

"And is the money stolen?"

"She is rich in her own right, but she holds money that does not belong to her."

"Will you tell me her story?"

"I will."

"Do so, and I will decide then whether or not I will join you against her."

Agatha Ravelli was born in the suburbs of Florence, the ancient capital of the De Medici family, and it is stated that her father was a man with noble blood in his veins; be that true or not, he was a bad man, a wonderful chemist, and the real inventor of all the methods used by forgers and alters of money. He was compelled to fly from Florence and sought refuge in Paris, where he became associated with thieves, revolutionists, and all manner of bad characters, and the daughter, although beautiful, was, as I have stated, trained in all the mysteries of chemistry. Her father succeeded in obtaining some money, for a season, from the Continent as an Italian court official, and claimed that his title to nobility was founded.

"At one of the famous resorts in Germany, Agatha Ravelli met a Russian, a widower, the son of a money-lender, a man who indeed has made loans to kings, and princes, and dukes, and lords, and he acquired enormous wealth.

"At the time Agatha Ravelli met Alexander Dubroski, his father still lived, but shortly after

his marriage to the beautiful Italian his father died, and it was not until after his death that the son learned of his father's enormous wealth.

"The elder Dubroski, as it transpired, had secreted millions in different places, and these secret deposits were revealed to the son, and the latter found himself one of the richest men in the world.

"At the time of the marriage between Dubroski and Agatha the former had a daughter by a previous marriage. The latter was just fifteen, and if living to-day would be eighteen or nineteen."

"You say 'if living to-day'?"

"Yes; for here comes the mystery: Dubroski made a will bequeathing certain wealth to his wife, but the bulk of his fortune was bequeathed to his child, Agatha being the rever-sionary legatee."

"Ah!" declared Galt, "I can guess now what I am to hear."

"Let me tell the whole story. Shortly after the making of the will Dubroski died suddenly."

"Murdered!" ejaculated Galt.

"That is the supposition; but we have no proof, although in my own mind I am satisfied that the poor man was poisoned."

"By his wife?"

"No; by her father. And one year later the daughter also died."

"Murdered."

"Here comes the mystery. The girl was supposed to have died, and was buried in the family vault; but the day after the burial the body was mysteriously spirited away."

"By whom?"

"Ah! there is the mystery."

"And who discovered the disappearance of the body?"

"An old nurse."

"Did she declare the fact?"

"She declared the fact to the reputed Count Ravelli, and the next day was found dead."

"And who later on revealed the secret?"

"I will tell you: the old nurse, upon making the discovery, wrote a long letter to me detailing certain facts, and begging me to come on to Russia. I proceeded to Russia, and learned all the facts I have detailed to you, having had a previous knowledge of the Italian history of Count Ravelli's career. Upon my arrival in Russia, as stated, I learned of the death of the nurse, but confirmed all the facts she had detailed to me in her letter. I called upon Agatha, but was refused admittance to her presence. Her father learned of my presence and had warned her, and two days after my call at her palace, she quit Russia, and I started in pursuit, and I have followed her from place to place until at last, as you know, I have trailed her to New York."

"And is her father with her?"

"He is dead."

"Dead!"

"Yes; he was killed in a broil with officers who sought to arrest him in Paris."

"Does the daughter know of his death?"

"She attributes his death to me."

"And are you responsible?"

"I am not. He was being arrested on political charges when he met his death."

"And now what is your suspicion?"

"I am satisfied that the real Mademoiselle Dubroski lives!"

CHAPTER XI.

"HAVE you any basis whereon to found your suspicion?" demanded Galt, in answer to M. Armand's startling announcement.

"I have studied all the points in the case, and I am convinced that my suspicion is correct: and, besides, I have learned of a certain strange incident that occurred on the steamer in which Agatha came to America. A rumor spread throughout the ship that there was a phantom on board; and it is a fact that some of the sailors actually believed in its presence, and some of the passengers admit a strange incident of the passage."

"I remember," said Galt, "reading of a phantom on a steamer. Did you interview the officers of the boat?"

"I did, but could gain no information from them—Agatha's money, I reckon, silenced their mouths."

"And the phantom assumed the shape of a young girl?"

"Of a beautiful young lady—indeed, one of the passengers, who did not believe in the apparition theory, described the appearance to me.

He said he met her one night on the deck, and caught a momentary glimpse of her face—a flesh-and-blood face of rare beauty, and he said, evidently a young lady of nineteen or twenty summers."

"And you think Agatha has this young lady secreted somewhere?"

"I am certain of it."

"And that is why you do not arrest her?"

"I can not arrest her unless I charge her with murder, and the proofs that could be produced in New York are so slight, I would only turn the laugh on myself."

"Then why does Agatha fear you?"

"She knows I am upon her track."

"But she must know you can not arrest her?"

"But she knows what I suspect."

"That she has murdered her husband?"

"She does not care for that suspicion."

"What is it she fears?"

"If I were out of the way she would be the richest woman in the world. She is aware that I am the only man who knows her secret."

"This is the existence of the real Mademoiselle Dubroski?"

"Yes."

"Why was the girl's life spared?"

"That is a mystery I have not solved; it may be that Agatha formed an affection for the girl, although robbing her of her fortune."

"Then I am to understand that your whole pursuit of Madame Dubroski is to establish the existence of Lucille Dubroski?"

"Yes."

"And to keep her secret she is seeking to murder you?"

"Yes; and were I to relate to you all the devices that woman has resorted to in order to put me out of the way your hair would stand on end."

"She has really sought to murder you?"

"There is not a device to which she has not resorted. She has hovered over me like death itself; but I have always been on my guard, and I have kept upon her track; and now an opportunity opens for us to delve into her mystery if it be that you possess the requisite nerve and address."

"Your story is a strange one, and the story told to me by Madame Dubroski is also a strange one."

"Would you suggest that one or the other must be true?"

"Yes."

"Which one do you believe?"

"Yours."

"Absolutely?"

"Yes."

"Then listen: if we succeed through your aid, I can promise you a fortune. What right have you to promise a fortune?"

"You are aware that I am a rich man?"

"So I have heard."

"Then I certainly can promise you a large reward."

"On your own account?"

"Certainly."

"That is enough for me. And now, how can I serve you?"

"Are you willing to serve me?"

"Yes."

"First you must know the risk."

"What is the risk?"

"My plan will lead the woman to believe that you have succeeded."

"In what?"

"In killing me."

"Well?"

"It is my idea that as soon as she learns that fact, she will wish to get rid of you."

"Have me murdered also?"

"Yes."

"Forewarned, forearmed!"

"But dare you take the risk?"

"Yes."

"You must know that she is a woman of extraordinary resources, and the risk is great."

"I am willing to take the chance."

"And we are united in this work?"

"It is only to discover the real Mademoiselle Dubroski!"

"Yes."

"I am with you."

"To the end?"

"Yes."

"There is to be perfect confidence between us?"

"Yes."

"You take one more risk?"

"Name it."

"The woman may draw you under her spell."

"Impossible now that I know her!"

"Still she may allure you."

"Well?"

"If she does you may fail me."

"Yes?"

"And then I will kill you!"

"I am to understand that death hovers over both sides?"

"Yes."

"I am still ready to join with you."

"If you carry yourself against her spells, you are safe. I will guarantee to protect you against her devices."

"You can depend upon me."

"So I thought, but my dependence will be great. I must actually put my life into your hands; circumstances have so turned that you can at this juncture serve my purpose better than any other man."

"And I am prepared to serve you."

"We play against an extraordinary woman."

"Yes."

"We must resort to extraordinary measures to gain her confidence."

"I understand."

"And face all the risks."

"Yes."

"Put your hand there!"

The two men grasped hands, and M. Armand said:

"Now listen; I ask you an impertinent question: did you really love Madame Dubroski? or was it her beauty and fortune alone that attracted you?"

A moment the Englishman remained silent.

"Answer me truly and fear not."

"I might have loved her."

"Answer me squarely."

"Since what you have told me I could not love her."

"Despite her beauty?"

"Despite her beauty."

"And you feel yourself prepared to resist all the spells she may throw around you?"

"I do."

"Just a few words more; my friendship you can win, and it may prove invaluable to you. I know Madame Dubroski does not and can not love you. She would but use you as a tool; or that in time you will have proof, but in the meantime she may succeed and deceive you."

"Never!"

"Enough; I will trust you!"

"You can trust me."

"One more fact: I have friends here in New York as powerful as myself, and they know all my moves; any treachery is sure to invite certain death."

"I tell you, once for all, you can trust me—trust me to the end."

"Very well, I will now reveal my plans to you."

CHAPTER XII.

M. ARMAND proceeded, and detailed a strange, weird plan, the purpose of which was to make it appear that he was dead; and when he had concluded, he said:

"Do you think you can aid me in carrying out this scheme?"

"I can, and I will."

The detective proceeded to present his plan more in detail, and an hour later Everard Galt was escorted to a carriage and driven back to his hotel.

The Englishman was rather bewildered by his night's adventures. He was a brave, shrewd fellow, not a bad man at heart, and he would not have entered into Agatha's scheme had he not at the time believed her story. Indeed when he set out to insult and force M. Armand to a challenge, he believed the Frenchman to be a cold-blooded assassin, who was hounding an unprotected and beautiful woman to death. As he thought matters over, he reached the conclusion that he was indeed a fortunate man, and he could well see how the beautiful Italian had merely sought to lure him as an instrument to rid herself, not of a pursuing foe, but a representative of justice, who was upon her track in the interest of law and right.

Upon the morning following the incidents we have described, several morning papers contained a sensational article concerning a mysterious duel that was said to be on the tapis.

The account stated that a quarrel had arisen between an Englishman and a Frenchman. Both combatants, it was stated, had an *enrage*

"I will explain. I possess a secret; I can fix your weapon so that but one prick of its point will make death certain."

The Englishman turned pale, and said, in a hollow voice:

"You would poison its point?"

"Yes; why not?—the man is a murderer; you're but an executioner!"

"I might as well drop poison into his wine! No, no, I will meet 'im in honorable combat."

"And run the risk of being killed! And then what will become of me? You are my last champion; if you fall, I succumb!"

"And what will you do?"

"Become the wife of this assassin; marry Monsieur Armand, that I may live. I do not wish to die. I love life too well."

"This is a terrible proposition you make to me!"

"Has Monsieur Armand seen your swords?"

"No."

"Ah, good! I have a pair I will present to you. Wait!"

The terrible woman left the room a moment, but soon returned with a pair of weapons.

"Use these," she said.

"Which one shall I use?"

"This one."

"But I must permit my antagonist a choice."

"Not necessarily. You know you can manage to give him any one particular sword."

"He may elect to fight with his own weapon."

"So much the better; then you can choose yours. But should he make a choice, and select the weapon you would use, you can still make an exchange at the last moment."

"I will make the attempt."

"See here; this is the weapon you are to use."

The woman showed the Englishman an unmistakable identification mark.

"You can make no mistake?"

"No."

"When are you to hear from Monsieur Armand?"

"If the meeting takes place to-night, I am to hear from him at midnight."

"It is well. He shall die!"

CHAPTER XIV.

GALT had carried on the conversation with a purpose, and he was fully convinced that M. Armand had told the truth as to the ferocity of the beautiful Italian. The Englishman had watched the play of her features and the gleam in her eyes while talking to her, and, being a good reader of the human face, he discerned that which caused him to loathe the woman, even though she were so ravishingly beautiful. When she proposed that he should fight with a poisoned weapon, all doubts in his mind were removed. But, alas! within the hour he was to meet with a still more startling confirmation.

He arose to go, taking the weapons with him.

"When shall I see you again?"

"As soon as all is over, provided I am alive."

"One promise," said the woman, in a hollow voice.

"What shall I promise?"

"If you succeed in killing Monsieur Armand, come to me."

"I will."

"Come prepared to take me to see the body."

"You?"

"Yes."

"Impossible!"

"No; you must so arrange it."

"But I may not be able."

"You must arrange it."

"But why do you make this strange request?"

"I shall never feel satisfied that he is dead unless I gaze upon his dead face."

"It is an unnatural request."

"Ah! you must remember the whole affair is unnatural. Remember your reward—my love and half my wealth!"

"If I succeed in killing Monsieur Armand I will merit both; and now, Agatha, listen: I am a stronger man than you suppose. I trust you in this matter, but should I learn that you intend to play me false, I will become even a more bitter foe and more to be feared than Monsieur Armand."

"I love you."

"Yes; and if I succeed I must have immediate proof of your love."

"You shall; I will marry you within an hour."

"This is a solemn promise?"

"It is a solemn promise; but, remember, I must know that Armand is dead, and to know that I must see his dead body with my own eyes."

"It shall be as you desire."

"It is well; and now listen; I remain here to-night to await a message from you. Summon me at any hour and I will come."

"And if I die?"

"Then I shall not hear from you."

"And will you mourn for me?"

"I shall kill myself."

The woman, despite all her shrewdness, did not appear to observe her contradictory statements; but Galt marked them, and only pretended to let them pass unobserved.

He left the house and returned to his hotel.

"It was just midnight when he reached his room, and upon entering he saw a man come to the door.

"Ah, monsieur!"

"Yes; I am here."

"I am glad; I was going to the rendezvous."

"I decided to meet you here; you have seen Agatha?"

"Yes."

"Well, what do you think?"

"I am satisfied that all you told me is true; and now, let me tell you, she has furnished me with swords to fight."

"Aha!"

"Yes."

"You have them?"

"They are here, and one of them is poisoned!"

"One of them poisoned?"

"Yes."

"Which one?"

Galt exhibited the sword with the poisoned point.

"And this is the one?"

"Yes."

"She intended to make sure of me!"

"Yes."

"Of both of us!" added M. Armand.

"What do you mean?"

"I propose to show you how well I know that woman, and how well I can anticipate her movements."

"I do not understand."

"But you shall understand; see here!"

M. Armand drew from his pocket a little cage; within the cage were two half-grown rats. Galt gazed in astonishment.

"Nice pets," said M. Armand.

"Yes; why do you carry such things around with you?"

"As witnesses."

"Witnesses!" ejaculated Galt.

"Yes."

The Englishman smiled.

"You think me an erratic Frenchman?"

"I must confess, yes."

"But these little animals are to act as tragic witnesses, and they are to prove what I told you."

Galt gazed with a look of wonderment upon his face.

"I told you Agatha was using you as a tool."

"Yes."

"I propose to prove that she does not lose sight of a single chance."

"And you prove it with the rats?"

"Yes."

"How?"

"Let me see—this is the poisoned sword?"

"Yes."

"You are sure?"

"I am sure."

"Now, do not by any possibility make any mistake—you are positive?"

"I am."

"Take the sword!"

Galt took the sword.

"Now, sir, I will show you something that will make your blood run cold. Pierce one of those rats with the point of the sword—just prick it, you need not wound it severely."

Galt took the sword, and, after a moment, succeeded in piercing one of the rodents, and, in a few seconds, the animal was lying upon the floor of the cage in convulsions.

"You see, she told you the truth."

"It's terrible!"

"Ah, the terror is to come. Get the other sword."

"Well?"

"I wish to show you something."

A pallor overspread Galt's face.

"That sword is not poisoned!"

"She so said."

"We will see whether or not she told the truth. Pierce the other rat."

Galt obeyed, and the effect was the same as upon the first rodent, and both lay struggling in convulsions. Galt's face was colorless.

"You see we would have died like two rats."

"Oh, horror!" ejaculated Galt.

"Now you believe me?"

"I want no further proof."

"You believe now that indeed I saved your life?"

"I do."

"There is no danger now that she can throw her spell around you again?"

"Could I love the woman who would murder me?"

"It is possible!" answered M. Armand, in a strange voice.

"No, sir, it is not possible!"

Galt, as the sequel will show, did not apprehend the real meaning of M. Armand.

"Now, then, am I to understand that you fully comprehend all my directions?"

"Yes."

"You can carry out my instructions?"

"Yes."

"She has played into our hands."

"Yes."

"Well, it is always good detective work," remarked M. Armand, "to have criminals play into your hands."

CHAPTER XV.

GALT was struck with admiration as he realized the coolness of the wonderful man with whom he was acting. The man appeared to be a Monte-Cristo in real life. He seemed to possess supernatural knowledge.

"You are surprised that I know so much?" said M. Armand, still more astonishing Galt by thus discerning his thoughts.

"Yes."

"Now, all that appears so wonderful is simple enough and only the result of experience in my calling as a detective. I have studied my subject. I know her disposition. I discern what she according to her disposition would be most likely to attempt, and I experiment to learn if I am right. Now, it might have been that only one of the swords was poisoned, then I would have been mistaken, that would have been all; but my experiment has resulted in the discovery that both were poisoned. You see I knew that she was but 'playing' you for a tool, and it struck me as a good scheme for her to dispose of us both with one trick, and you see I discerned correctly."

"It is even so."

"We now have this woman in our power; we will have her as open to us as a book in a few days. She is deep and dangerous. I am letting her play. She leads the cards, I play against her. She will lead the wrong card soon, and then I take the trick and win the game; and now you see both rats are dead."

"Yes."

"You watched the manner of their death?"

"I did."

"You can magnify their struggles as they would occur in a human being?"

"I can."

"Then you can describe to Agatha how I died."

"Ah! I see."

"Oh, yes; we must be prepared in every minor detail. It is a close game we are playing against a skillful player. She is watching you as closely as you say you watched her while talking to her."

"She is indeed a wonderful woman!"

"She is more than that; but she must lose in this game. And now, you are sure you can carry out all my instructions?"

"I am sure."

"You can go forward just as I have directed you, to the minute. You need not fear the kink in the chain of incidents, so far as I have to perform my part."

"I know that."

"Then at two o'clock be at her house. Rush in; be overcome with emotion and terror. But do it easy; do not overdo it, or you will excite her suspicion; and then, when you have sufficient strength, bring her to gaze on my dead body."

"You run a great risk, monsieur."

"Ah? how so?"

"A thought has just struck me."

"Speak."

"She may wish to make sure of your death."

"Ah! I see. Well, I have provided for that."

"It would be easy for her to carry a

poniard."

"Yes, but am not afraid, I never give such

chances."

"How can you provide against such a con-

"I have provided; you need not fear; some day I will tell you how I provide against such a chance, and now adieu; you must kill me with the poisoned sword."

The detective stepped to the door, turned and said in a solemn voice:

"One word more: I always provide against every adverse contingency."

As M. Armand spoke, he fixed his wonderful eyes on Galt in a peculiar manner. The Englishman read their meaning glance and exclaimed:

"Ah, you need not fear me!"

"I do not; good-night."

Galt was alone.

"Well, well," he muttered, "these are strange adventures I am encountering. How will it all end? but one fact is established; that siren did mean to murder me, and she will seek to murder me again, as soon as she discovers that I have accomplished her work; and so deep is she that I may pay with my life the penalty for all this intrigue!"

It was exactly five minutes of two o'clock when Galt appeared at the residence in Twentieth Street. He obeyed instructions as to finding entrance and was shown into the presence of the princess.

The woman stood, pale and expectant, and the circumstances were such that Galt had no difficulty in getting up a pallor. He rushed into the room, threw himself upon a chair, and buried his face in his hands.

"Is it over?" demanded the siren, in a husky voice.

"Do not ask me!"

"Is it over?"

"Oh, woman, woman! what have I done?"

"Answer me."

The answer came in a hollow voice:

"I am an assassin!"

"He is dead!"

"I am murderer!"

"Tell me, is he dead?"

"Oh, the horror!"

"I am answered."

"Agatha, would that I had never seen you! would that he had killed me! Oh, that I should have been guilty of such cold-blooded cruelty; and alas! he died knowing that he was murdered, and he had treated me with the trust and confidence of a gentleman!"

"He was himself an assassin!"

"It matters not; my act was treacherous."

The woman crossed the room and threw her arms around her supposed instrument's neck, and she pressed her lips upon his forehead and murmured:

"Fear not, you have done a righteous deed! Listen to me—I know all."

"You know all?"

"Yes."

A shudder ran through Galt's frame.

"What do you know?"

"I know the tale that man told you; yes, I know he told you that your own life was in danger, that I was false, and but using you as a tool; but I will prove to you that what he said was false. He is dead, and I love you, and I shall become your wife, and in making you happy I shall prove that man a liar!"

Galt was all adrift. The beautiful enchantress who was talking to him evidently did know something of what had occurred, and the question arose in his mind as to how much she did know, and he saw that it was needful for him to be careful.

"How do you know that the man told me what you say?"

"I know what he has told others. His story is not a new one."

"Ah!" thought Galt, "she is reasoning on the French system: she merely surmises." And he said:

"I have not been on friendly terms with the man whom I set out to kill."

"Did he not accuse you of being my tool?"

"I did not permit him to tell me anything."

"How did you quarrel with him?"

"I insulted him, as I told you."

"And when you met?"

"But few words passed between us; no explanations."

If our readers will remember, the explanations came after the singular duel.

The princess fixed a penetrating glance on Galt, and asked:

"Tell me truly; did he not mention my name?"

"He did say that I was acting at your instigation."

"And what did you say?"

"And what could I say, as a gentleman?"

"You denied it?"

"No; I said there were no explanations to be made."

CHAPTER XVI

"AND he is dead?"

"If he is not dead, I am not a murderer—if he is dead, I am!"

"I do not understand."

"My words are plain. Do not talk to me—I hate myself! I may learn to hate you!"

"Hate me?"

"Yes."

"Why?"

"Because it is for that I have done this tardy act—fought a man with a poisonous weapon!"

"And did his choice fall on that weapon?"

"No; but, like a true gentleman, he said:

"I will accept the arm from you." Ah, Agatha, I felt like breaking the blade in twain. To think of it—to murder a man who thus trusted me!"

"But, remember, he was himself a murderer."

"That does not excuse me. I betrayed him, and, ere he died, he upbraided me."

"And how did he die?"

"The moment I pricked him with the sword he started back, gazed at me a moment reproachfully, uttered the words I have repeated, and fell into convulsions."

"And did you stay near until he died?"

"I did."

"And then?"

"I came to you."

"There were no witnesses to the combat?"

"No; he trusted to my honor."

"And his body?"

"Is where it fell."

"I would see it."

"Do not ask me to take you there."

"Yes."

"To-morrow."

"No; to-night—at once."

"I am your slave since I have done this foul deed; come, I obey."

The woman robed herself; they descended to the street; a carriage was at the door.

It was three o'clock when the carriage stopped in front of the mansion where Galt had been taken by the mysterious woman; they descended and Agatha was ushered into the house. The woman was cool and firm.

There was no light in the hall, and they were compelled to grope their way to the stairs. The Englishman held the hand of the princess; it was cold as ice, but she was firm; they reached a room on the second floor.

"Wait here," said Galt, and he entered the room alone.

A moment and he returned; his face was like a corpse, and he trembled like an aspen leaf.

"Come," he said, and he led the woman into the room. A horrible sight met her gaze; on the floor, doubled into a heap and looking hideous in the face, lay the contorted form of M. Armand.

A moment the woman stood and gazed, then she advanced and placed her hand on the forehead of the murdered man, and then the jeweled hand ran to the spot over the heart. She bent her head and placed her ear and listened, and then, rising, asked:

"Where did you pierce him?"

Galt pointed to the arm, where there was a black spot, from the center of which a little blood had trickled.

"I am satisfied," she said; "come, we will go!"

"I will never know peace again!" murmured Galt.

"Yes, I will render you peace for the peace you have rendered me."

The pair left the room, and, as the carriage rolled away, a woman dressed in black stole into the room where the dead man lay and poured a colorless liquid from a vial down his throat, and an instant later M. Armand rose to his feet as strong and pliant as ever!

"Aha!" he muttered, with a pleased smile,

"we know something of drugs ourselves! She

did not suspect—she has been fooled! She thinks me dead, and yet again will I appear to her!"

Meantime, Galt accompanied the princess to her apartments. The latter was silent, and, upon reaching her home, said:

"You must come and see me to-morrow."

"Where shall I call?"

"Here."

"And will I see you?"

"Yes."

"Remember my warning. You are to prove to me that I was not your tool."

"I will."

"And to-morrow we are to be married?"

"To-morrow I will answer you."

"There is but one answer you can make."

The two parted, and Galt proceeded to his hotel, where, upon his arrival, he was amazed to see a man awaiting him at his room door.

"This is Mr. Galt?"

"That is my name."

"I have a message for you."

"From whom?"

"I will tell you after we enter your room."

Galt saw that their movements were watched by the night-watchman of the hotel, and in a loud voice he said:

"I am sorry I kept you waiting so long; come in and remain with me till breakfast-time."

The man followed the Englishman into the room, and when the door was closed the latter said:

"Now, who are you, and what do you want?"

"Do you not recognize me?"

Galt examined the man's face and said.

"I do not remember ever having seen you before."

"And yet we are not strangers to each other."

"To me you are a stranger."

"You have just left the house of Madame Dubroski?"

"Well?"

"You took her to see the body of the man you murdered?"

Galt's heart stood still; a suspicion ran through his mind; it came to him that already the princess had set a trap for him, that indeed she had caught him in her net.

"Before I talk further with you, I must know who you are."

"I am a friend."

"And yet you are making strange statements."

"You have been doing strange things."

"Tell me, plainly, what do you want?"

"Twenty thousand dollars."

"You want twenty thousand dollars?"

"Yes."

"For what?"

"My silence."

Galt's blood ran cold. He began to discern that indeed he had been trapped.

"You want twenty thousand dollars for your silence?"

"Yes."

"How do you know I possess twenty thousand dollars?"

"The princess gave you twenty thousand dollars, or rather loaned it to you."

"And I am to pay you?"

"Yes."

"At whose command?"

"My own."

"To keep silence?"

"Yes."

"Of what can you speak?"

"This night's work."

"What has occurred this night?"

"A murder."

"Ah, who was murdered?"

"Monsieur Armand."

"Is he dead?"

"Yes."

"How came he to his death?"

"Killed with a poisoned sword."

"At whose hands?"

"Yours."

"If I refuse you twenty thousand dollars, what will you do?"

"Lead a detective to the house where the dead man lies."

"You know where the house is?"

"I do."

"Under whose orders are you acting?"

"My own."

"How came you possessed of the information you claim to have?"

"That is my secret."

"Who are you?"

"I am Monsieur Armand."

CHAPTER XVII.

GALT had another evidence of the detective and strategic skill of M. Armand, and he exclaimed:

"Well, this is wonderful! You have completely transformed yourself! I claim to be a shrewd man myself, but I admit I have been deceived."

"It is not strange. My life has been devoted to the study as to how to change my appearance, and I could meet you to-morrow and you would not know me."

"No, you can never again deceive me. I will be looking for a transform next time, and I will surely know you."

"Our scheme went off well so far."

"Yes."

"The woman really believes I am dead?"

"I think she does. But why did you come here to-night?"

"To prepare you against a trick."

"What trick do you suspect?"

"The trick that I have just played."

"What do you mean?"

"The woman will test you. If you scare, she will be satisfied that I am really dead; if you do not scare, her suspicions will be aroused."

"Is she deep enough to attempt such a game?"

"She is. And now tell me, how did she act after she left my house?"

"She said but little."

"She was to marry you within an hour?"

"So she had promised."

"Did you recall her promise?"

"Yes."

"And what did she say?"

"She is to see me to-morrow."

"Where?"

"At the house in Twentieth Street. But she may not see me."

"Yes, she will see you; and, when once sure that I am dead, you must look out; and now let me tell you something: she wishes to marry a real prince, and I alone stood in her way. You must take my place, but under different circumstances."

M. Armand proceeded, and opened up a big scheme to the Englishman, and instructed him how he must act when next he met the princess.

It was daylight when the Frenchman left the room, and Galt at last had an opportunity to snatch a few hours' sleep.

It was midday, when the Englishman was aroused by a knock at his door, and, in answer to his summons, a stranger stepped into the room. The visitor was a foreigner, and he closed and locked the door behind him in the most careful and assured manner.

"My friend, why do you lock my door?"

"I wish to have a private talk with you."

"Open your business, sir."

The stranger took a seat, and, after glancing around the room in a furtive manner, demanded, in a low tone:

"Where is Monsieur Armand?"

Galt turned pale, showed signs of great nervousness, and answered:

"Why do you come to me to ask concerning Monsieur Armand?"

"I have reason to suspect that you know of his whereabouts."

"Who are you, sir?"

"That is my affair. Answer my question."

"I know nothing of Monsieur Armand."

"Is he living?"

"I imagine he is living."

"You were last seen in his company?"

"Yes; it is possible."

"And where did you leave him?"

"On the French steamer 'Amerique'."

"Sir!" ejaculated the stranger.

"What I tell you is true: Monsieur Armand sailed for France yesterday."

"It is false."

Galt appeared more and more excited and nervous as he answered:

"I have nothing more to say, and I must request you to leave my room."

"I must have proof that Monsieur Armand sailed for Europe."

"Go find the proof."

"You will give me no satisfaction?"

"I have given you all the satisfaction that I can; and again I must bid you to leave, as I am expecting a friend to call upon me on business."

"I will go, sir, but you shall hear from me again, especially if I am not assured speedily of the safety of Monsieur Armand."

All's agitation increased; the man surveyed him keenly, but at length departed.

When he had gone the Englishman muttered:

"Well, well, Armand was once again right in his suspicion."

It was evening when Galt proceeded to the house in Twentieth Street. He was admitted to the room where, upon two occasions, he had held interviews with Agatha, and it was fully an hour before madame put in an appearance.

She appeared looking wan and scared; indeed there had occurred a most remarkable change in her appearance. She entered the room with a dramatic step, and crossing to where Galt sat she clasped his hand in a convulsive manner and murmured:

"We are lost!"

"Lost, Agatha?"

"Yes."

"I do not understand."

"Ah, you were not careful."

"How, careful?"

"You compromised me."

"I compromised you?"

"Yes."

"How?"

"Oh, I am so terrified!"

"What has terrified you?"

"A detective has been here!"

"A detective has been here?" repeated Galt.

"Yes."

"What was the purpose of his visit?"

"He came to demand at my hands Monsieur Armand."

"Ah, he was here?"

"Yes."

"When?"

"This morning early."

"Describe the man."

Madame described the same man who had visited at Galt's room.

"The same man visited me."

"He did?"

"Yes."

"We're lost!"

"How so?"

"Suspicion is directed against us; we will be arrested."

"Oh, no, you need not fear."

"But they will find the body."

"Never!"

"What have you done with it?"

"It is in the hands of a chemist, and in a few weeks his bones will be shipped to France. You need not fear; we are safe."

"Can you trust the chemist?"

"Yes, with my life—because I hold his life in my hands."

"Oh, I shall die! This will always be a terror over me."

"It need not be. And now, when will you make good your promise?"

"My promise?"

"Yes."

"Which promise?"

"Your promise to marry me."

"Oh, you can not ask me to marry you under the present circumstances!"

"Ah! do you mean to play me false?"

"Play you false, Everard? I love you; but you will save me!"

"Are you in danger?"

"Yes; I have been threatened."

"And how can I save you?"

"I am going to test your love for me, and when the test is established I will marry you."

"This is not according to your promise. You made but one condition—you told me when Armand was dead you would become my wife."

"And I will; but you must give me one more proof of your love."

"What proof do you require?"

"I am under suspicion as Armand's murderer."

"You can not be!"

"I know that I am."

"And what can I do?"

"Do you love me?"

"Yes."

"I will give you a chance to prove it, and then I will become your wife."

CHAPTER XVIII.

"How can I believe you, Agatha? you may go on and make another condition after I have passed the ordeal which you now require!"

"No."

"What is it you would have me do?"

"Prove that you love me!"

"How can I?"

"You know I had nothing to do with the death of Monsieur Armand; you considered him

your rival; you quarreled with him and killed him to win my hand!"

"But at your suggestion."

"Hush!" cried the woman, and she fixed a fierce glance on Galt.

"Will you make good your promise?"

"Yes, when you do what I ask."

"What do you ask?"

"I wish you to draw up a paper detailing the manner of Monsieur Armand's death."

"If I do, I must state that you furnished me the poisoned weapon."

"Are you a man of honor? can you demand my love when you possess so little chivalry?"

"What would you have me do? write a confession assuming the whole responsibility of Monsieur Armand's death?"

"Yes."

"And who will hold that paper?"

"I will; can you not trust your wife?"

"But you are not my wife; when you are I will write the confession."

"Can you ask me to marry you when you can not trust me?"

"This is a terrible request you make of me!"

"It is plainly to be seen that you do not love me; it was my wealth you craved."

"It's false!"

"Then make me your wife!"

"I will, at once."

"But you must do so by writing the confession."

"Then I shall be wholly in your power!"

"In the power of your wife!"

"And you insist upon the confession?"

"I do."

"And you swear not to exact another condition?"

"I swear!"

"It is strange that you make this condition!"

"No, it is not strange; it's strange that you refuse to trust me."

"I will; but if you betray me, beware!"

"You will sign the paper?"

"I will prepare a paper."

"It is already prepared. I had perfect confidence in you, and I prepared the confession."

"Where is it?"

"Here."

The woman produced a paper drawn up in the form of a deposition. Galt read it over. The paper was skillfully prepared.

"I will sign it," he said; "give me pen and ink."

The madame rang a bell, and two persons entered the room—a man and a woman. Both were masked.

"Who are these people?"

"Witnesses."

"But why do I not see their faces?"

"They do not wish to be known. Now, sign the paper."

Galt signed the paper, and the two masked people attested as witnesses and withdrew from the room.

"Now I have proved my love."

"Yes."

"When does the marriage take place?"

"We will arrange that anon."

"It must take place at once."

"No, no; you must not be so impatient!"

"Give me that paper. You hold my life in your hands."

"You demand this paper?"

"I do."

"Mark me; if you insist upon having this paper, which I hold in my hand you absolve me of my promise to become your wife."

"I demand the paper. You are deceiving me!"

"Mark my words; the demand of this paper proves your distrust."

"Give me the paper."

The woman handed over the folded paper. Galt unfolded it and discovered that he held a blank sheet.

"What does this mean?"

"It means that you do not trust me."

"Rather it proves your perfidy."

"Hush! do not use such language to me!"

"I speak what I mean!"

"Beware, or I order you from my presence never to enter it again; and, remember, I hold your confession as a murderer."

"Ah, I see, you have played a game with me. I have committed one murder, I may commit a second."

"Dare you threaten me?"

"You hold that confession over me?"

"I do."

"Well, listen; I am not as weak a tool as you imagine. I confess I murdered Armand, but

from his body I took certain papers, and this morning I employed my time reading those papers."

The madame turned pale.

"Yes," said Galt, "you have thrown off the mask (too soon.)"

"What do you mean?"

"I possess your secret."

"My secret?"

"Yes."

"What secret of mine do you possess?"

"I have become the heir of Monsieur Armand. All that he knew concerning you I know."

The princess became greatly agitated, but she exclaimed:

"This is nonsense!"

"Think you so?"

"It is, indeed!"

"And yet I know that your husband's daughter lives!"

The woman's face became colorless.

"You have those papers?"

"Yes, a detailed account of your whole career. I know of your husband's murder; the trick played with the daughter. I know all the story you told me was false. Monsieur Armand is dead, but he has left a true history of Madame Dubroski, *née* Mademoiselle Ravelli. I found the papers on his body. Madame, you attempted to play a deep game with me, but I have a check on you. Now will you become my wife?"

"I will; yes, on one condition."

"Ah, a new condition?"

"Yes."

"What is the condition now?"

"You must give to me the papers you found on the body of Monsieur Armand."

"And have you laugh in my face?"

"I demand the papers."

"And I refuse to surrender them."

"Listen to me, Everard Galt; I hold your confession as a murderer!"

"You dare not use the confession!"

"You do not know me."

"You dare not use it!"

"I dare, I will!"

"Then I will make public the papers of Monsieur Armand."

"You can not authenticate them."

"You are mistaken, madame, I can; and now listen to me: it is a drawn game between us; you have made a demand from me, I will make a demand from you; where is your late husband's child? surrender her to me."

"Bah! you fool me!"

"No."

"You have not the papers you claim."

"Indeed I have."

"Let me see them."

"I will in good time."

"You have them not."

"I have them."

"With you?"

"Yes."

"Show them to me."

"Not now; in good time."

"They belong to me."

"You shall have them when you come to my terms."

The woman rang the bell and two men entered the room, and Galt coolly asked:

"Well, what do these two scoundrels want here?"

CHAPTER XIX.

"Your life!" came the answer.

A satirical smile played over Galt's face as he exclaimed:

"So this is a part of the game!"

The princess slipped from the room and a third man entered; the fellows were all well armed.

Galt was cool and spoke firmly when he said:

"My friends, I came here prepared for some such little game as this, and I give you just one minute to get out of the room, or there will follow some excitement here!"

As the Englishman spoke he broke through a window-pane, and in his hand he held a cocked revolver.

"I fire, and help will come to me!"

The men stood irresolute, and one of them left the room, and a moment later the princess returned.

"Madame," said Galt, "I had reason to suspect treachery; the papers I found on the body of Monsieur Armand prepared me, and I came to this house ready for all chances; my finger at this moment rests on safety."

There was no mistaking Galt's meaning. His

words suggested the fact that the pistol-shot would prove a signal to summon help.

The beautiful face of the princess was a thrilling study at the moment; her eyes gleamed, her lips were blue, and her face colorless.

"What do you mean?" she asked.

"I mean just what I say!"

"And you came here determined to prove false to me?"

"Do not speak of being false, please; you have thrown aside your own mask."

"Not until I learned that you were false. You have announced yourself as my enemy, and now you must take the consequences. I may yet do for you what has been done for Monsieur Armand."

"Do not imagine, madame, that I will so easily become your victim!"

"Murderer! you have signed your confession, the paper is in my possession!"

"You dare not use it against me!"

"Ah! I dare not!"

"No."

"You shall see."

"When you do, I will use the papers of Monsieur Armand. His is a detailed account; indeed, his own course was mapped out. I can follow the instructions he had laid down for his own guidance. And now, madame, I will bid you a good-night."

Galt, with his pistol in his hand, moved toward the door of the room: The assassins had previously retired. The princess offered no opposition to his departure, and he reached the street in safety.

Two days passed, and during the interval Galt and Armand held many conferences. The latter was displeased as to the result of all his scheming. He had not calculated upon a quarrel between Galt and Mme. Dubroski.

During the two days there had arrived at the hotel where Galt lodged, an elderly lady, accompanied by her niece. The latter was young, handsome, and seemingly very gay; but she was under the constant surveillance of the stern-looking old aunt.

The new-comers had a seat at the same table in the dining-room with the Englishman, and the latter received many a sly glance from the little beauty.

Galt was a man of the world, possessed a keen appreciation of female loveliness, and was rather flattered at the covert attention he received from the fair mademoiselle.

One day the young lady appeared at the table alone, and soon found an opportunity to address her companion, and with the most girlish freedom commenced to let herself out.

Her first announcement was that her aunt was sick, and did not know that her niece had come to the table alone. Once started she told a long story about herself.

Galt was delighted and enjoyed a most pleasant *vis-à-vis*.

When the meal was concluded the pretty little schemer told Galt that he must never speak to her in the presence of the aunt, and never let it be known that they had ever exchanged a word. The necessary promise was given, and the sweet little hour of pleasant talk was past and gone.

That same evening, Everard Galt related his little adventure to M. Armand, when the Frenchman asked:

"How long have this aunt and pretty niece been in the hotel?"

"They arrived the morning following my last meeting with Agatha."

"And their names?"

"Verrasci."

A thoughtful look passed over M. Armand's face as he remarked:

"You must be very careful."

"Ah, you fear I may fall in love?"

"Yes; men of the world like you fall in love with every new face."

"What harm if I do fall in love?"

"It may be that death lurks in every smile of Mademoiselle Verrasci."

"I do not understand."

"No; you have not had my experience. It may be all right; it may be all wrong; but listen: you must repeat to me everything that occurs between you and this fair girl."

"I do not know why I should."

"It will be better for you."

"Nonsense! you are pressing too closely into my affairs."

"You told of the acquaintance?"

"Yes."

"All right. Do you remember what I said to you after we had fought the duel?"

"Yes."

"What did I say?"

"You said you had fought me in order to save my life."

"You are sure that is what I said?"

"I am."

"All right; I proved my words good."

"I admit you did."

"I am warning you now to save your life."

"How?"

"Well, in a few days we shall see. Listen: does it not strike you as strange that this aunt and niece should be placed at your table in the hotel?"

"No; it is an ordinary incident."

"Does it not strike you as strange that the niece should steal down alone to dinner and boldly make your acquaintance?"

"No; I have often made acquaintances under the same circumstances."

"That may be. At those times a shrewd, despicable woman was not seeking your life."

A smile played over Galt's face.

"Do you think it is a scheme on the part of Agatha?"

"Well, I can not tell, but under the circumstances we must study closely every little incident. I do not desire to see you become a victim, and I think that we are on the eve of fulfilling the mystery as to the existence of Mademoiselle Dubroski."

"You may rest assured that the parties at the hotel are not engaged in any scheme against me."

"You feel assured of that fact?"

"Yes."

"Well, now, possibly you are correct, but we will investigate; we will go to your hotel."

The two men proceeded to the hotel, and M. Armand gave Everard Galt a few instructions. The latter went to the dining-room, slipped a five-dollar bill into the hand of the chief waiter, and asked him who the ladies were who occupied seats at his table. The head waiter was a man who understood his business, and was chary as to giving information.

"How did you come to place them at my table?"

"Well, sir, I don't know as I ought to tell."

"Yes, tell me."

The waiter looked around carefully, and then said, in a low voice:

"They asked me to be placed at your table."

CHAPTER XX.

GALT could not refrain from a little exclamation of surprise. M. Armand had said he would learn that the discovery he had just made was the fact.

"Well?" inquired Armand, when the two men rejoined each other.

"It is as you said."

"She asked to be seated at your table?"

"Yes."

"I thought so. And now are you convinced?"

"My suspicions are indeed aroused."

"Good! now that we are forewarned we will know how to act."

"Do you suspect the scheme?"

"Yes; and I think that once more the fair Agatha is going to play into my hands."

"What will be my part in the game?"

"We shall see. Let matters run as they are going; the pretty little table *vis-à-vis* has made your acquaintance—that one step is accomplished: that is their first real move; and now you must not spoil the play as you did with Agatha. You must be as innocent and gullible as a genuine rural; let her give all the orders, you just fall into her drum-beats."

That evening the young lady appeared in the parlor of the hotel just one moment, and she beckoned to Galt, as the latter passed through the corridor. He obeyed the summons, and the mademoiselle said:

"I will intrust a secret to you."

"Many thanks."

"I am going to the French ball."

"Ah! indeed!"

"Yes. I have arranged it with my maid; and my aunt, who is really very sick, will not know anything about it."

"That will be quite a charming little *ruse*, and I've no doubt you will have much pleasure."

"Shall I see you there?" asked the fair girl in an arch manner.

"Certainly, I shall be there; let me see, when does it take place?"

"To-morrow."

"Yes, I can go."

"And what costume will you wear?"
"Oh, that's telling; you must find me out."
"No, no; you must tell me."
"Then it shall be an exchange of confidences?"
"Yes."

The exchange of confidences took place, and the girl said:
"I must go now; but you will surely be there?"

"I will be there, you may depend."
"And you will seek me out?"
"Certainly."
"Do not fail, and to-morrow I will tell you a secret, and take you and show you some wonders of which you have never dreamed."
"How kind you are!"

The girl slipped away, and an hour later Galt and M. Armand met.

"Well, what news do you bring me?"
"I have news indeed."
"Hush! now let me show what I know; let me prove my methods."

"Proceed."
"The girl has arranged a meeting with you?"
"Yes."

A moment the detective was thoughtful, but at length he said:
"You are to meet at the French ball to-morrow night?"

Galt looked puzzled as he demanded:
"How is it you know the particulars of an engagement that is not an hour old?"

"I have been prepared for something of the kind. Now tell me all about it."

Galt related the manner in which the engagement had been made.

"Now I think we are on the right track. Will you permit me to go to your hotel?"

"Certainly."
M. Armand spent a long time in Everard Galt's room at his hotel, and when the two men separated there appeared to be an excellent understanding between them.

On the following night the annual ball was to take place, and those who have attended the same in years past can attest to the splendor and magnificence of the affair.

Everard Galt was on hand at the appointed time, and it was not long before he espied the costume which was to serve as a disguise for the young lady with whom he had become acquainted at the hotel.

The Englishman did not rush forward and make himself known, but set to watch the beautiful intrigante who had sought an escapade upon so slight an acquaintance, and it was not long before he discovered that the seemingly artless girl was really in quest of him.

Watching an opportunity the Englishman, who had as a matter of precaution adopted a costume different from the one agreed upon, stepped up and whispered the query in the girl's ear:

"Is he here?"
The girl made no reply, but rapidly glided away; and a few moments later the same question was whispered in her ear, and upon glancing around she failed to see who could have spoken to her; and her surprise was still greater later on when a female, in gliding by, reached over and whispered:

"Is he here?"
Mlle. Verrasci seemingly became agitated and bewildered, as she hastened to one of the retiring-rooms and seated herself.

Half an hour passed, when a little girl, dressed as a page, entered the retiring-room, and upon seeing the mademoiselle, lisped:

"Is he here?"
Mademoiselle sprung to catch hold of the little miss and question her, but the child glided out of the room and disappeared in the great throng.

Mademoiselle at length re-entered the main room, and after a few moments recognized the costume that Galt had described as the one he would wear, and, making her way through the crowd of merry-makers, she approached the masker, and whispered:

"Ah, you have come at last!"
"Yes, I am here."
"I have encountered such a strange adventure!"
"Indeed!"
"Yes."
"Tell me about it."
"You must have told of your expected meeting with me."
"Not a word."
"You are sure?"
"Certainly."

"And yet there are half a dozen people in this room who knew I was awaiting your coming."

"What makes you think so?"
The mademoiselle related how several persons had whispered in her ear the pointed question, "Is he here?"
The gentleman laughed and answered:
"Ah! don't you see the joke?"
"No; it is a serious matter."
"That is the conventional question always addressed by the maskers to ladies or gentlemen on the floor unaccompanied."

"Ah! that is so?"
"Yes. And now let me see your face."
"You can not see my face now."
"I must."

"Why?"
"Well, there are so many tricks played behind a mask."

"And you suspect I intend some trick?"
"It is possible."
"Come with me, and you shall see my face."

"No; I will not go anywhere until I see your features."

"I can not stay here."
"Why not?"
"I have received such a shock."
"What is it you desire to do?"

"I made you a promise—I was to show you something wonderful."

"I remember."
"Come, and I will make good my promise."
"I can not go until I see your face."

"Do you insist?"
"I do."
"Very well; you shall be gratified. Look!"

The mademoiselle quickly removed her mask, and disclosed the handsome roguish face of Miss Verrasci.

CHAPTER XXI.

"ARE you satisfied?" demanded the mademoiselle.

"Perfectly."
"Will you go with me?"
"Where do you wish to go?"
"In a carriage."
"And leave the ball?"
"Yes."

"Why did you come here?"

"I wished to avoid all chance of being discovered in your company."

"And you wish me to go with you in a carriage?"
"Yes."

"And where will you take me?"
"Are you afraid?"
"No."

"You are ungrateful."
"How?"

"You ask questions of a lady who grants you a permission many would be glad to receive."

"Ah, I see! I am to go it blind."
"If at all, yes."

"I am at your service."

"Listen: At the corner of Thirtieth Street you will find a carriage; the driver wears a light livery; you will find the carriage-door open; enter without question."

"Who will be in the carriage?"

"I will be in the carriage with my maid; but you must not speak in the carriage; you must remain silent until we are at the end of our journey."

"This appears to me a mad freak!"

"If you are unwilling to go, say so."

"I will go."

"Then you must do so willingly, and without any more expression of suspicion."

"All right; I am ready."

"Enough! Remember, you will find the carriage at Thirtieth Street; you are to enter without question, and in the carriage you are not to speak. We will drive a long distance, and you must not speak until we have entered the house, and have ascended to the apartment where we will both unmuske. Do you accept my conditions?"

"Yes; I accept your conditions."

"Enough! ta, in, for the present!"

The mademoiselle waved her hand playfully and glided away.

Twenty minutes later Galt appeared at the corner of Thirtieth Street, and there stood the carriage. He advanced and found the door open and saw two females inside; without a word he stepped in and the carriage was driven away.

As far as Galt could calculate he rode for

about an hour, when the carriage halted before a house which stood alone near the river bank.

The conditions had been strictly observed; not a word had been exchanged during the ride.

"We will descend here and enter the house."

"All right," came the response.

The lady led the way; the door of the house opened at their approach without a summons having been sounded; the lady led the way to a large rear room on the first floor, and upon entering Galt uttered an exclamation of astonishment. He found himself in the midst of splendors that were only equaled in the apartments of Mme. Dubroski.

An elegant repast was upon the table, but there was no one present to serve it. Both had retained their masks.

"Are you surprised?" demanded the mysterious conductress.

"No," came the answer.

"You are not surprised?"

"I am not."

"You are a very stoical man."

"Yes."

"Your stoicism is seldom disturbed?"

"Very seldom."

"I have a greater surprise for you."

"Ah, indeed, have you?"

"Yes; look!"

The mademoiselle removed her mask, and disclosed, not the features of Miss Verrasci, but the beautiful face of Agatha Dubroski.

Galt did not display any surprise.

"You are not surprised now?"

"No."

"You will not confess it."

"I speak truly; I expected the removal of the mask would disclose your face."

"You did?" ejaculated Agatha.

"I did."

"Remove your mask; we will eat and make friends."

"Do you wish to make friends with me?"

"Yes."

"Then why have you gone through all this secrecy?"

"Shall I tell you?"

"Certainly."

"I wished to have you in my power."

"Am I in your power now?"

"You are at my mercy. I hold your life in my hands."

The two were seated before the table.

"Will you remove your mask?"

"Presently; first let us come to an understanding; you wished to have me in your power?"

"Yes."

"And am I in your power?"

"Yes."

"My life you hold at your will?"

"Yes; I have outwitted you this time."

"All right; I admit that you have outwitted me. Now, what is your demand?"

"I wish you to pass over to me those papers you took from the body of Monsieur Armand."

"I shall not surrender them."

"You refuse?"

"Yes."

"You forget you are at my mercy."

"No, I do not."

"And you refuse?"

"Yes."

"You shall have evidence as to your helplessness. Rise from that chair."

Galt sought to rise from the chair when he made the startling discovery that he had indeed been tricked. He was yoked in the chair. The woman's eyes gleamed with delight and triumph as she rang a little bell and three powerful men entered the room.

"Bind him!" commanded the Circe.

The men set to work and in a few moments Galt was bound hand and foot. He offered no resistance. The mask had been removed from his face, and his features were calm.

"Go!" said the woman when her victim was bound and secured in the most effective manner.

"Now, what do you think?"

"I am waiting."

"Waiting for what?"

"Your next move."

"You do not appear to realize your danger!"

"No."

The woman drew a glittering stiletto.

"See," she said, "I can pierce your heart, and, when you are dead, dispose of your body at my convenience. You have no friends in this country. There will be no inquiry for you, and you will have passed away to be forgotten forever."

"You draw a terrible picture."

"And you do not yield?"
"No."
"What would you have me do?"
"Pierce my heart with your steel, and end the affair."
"Oh! you desire to die?"
"It is a thousand times worse than death to be compelled to sit here in the presence of such a creature as Madame Dubroski."
The woman's face flushed with anger.
"Dare you insult me?"
"Is it possible to insult a murderer?"
"I am not a murderer. I do not mean to kill you."
"I do not ask mercy at your hands."
"You defy me?"
"Yes."
"Listen; I swear I do not mean to kill you. I merely intend to consign you to a stone vault, and then—"
The woman halted.
"Well, what then?"
"I will leave you there, bound hand and foot, to feed yourself."

CHAPTER XXII.

GALT still failed to betray any agitation.
"Do you understand?" demanded the siren.
"Yes, I understand."
"I will not kill you; I will merely permit you to quietly waste away."
"You are very considerate."
"You turned against me and invited your own doom."
"Is there no way for me to avert my doom?"
"Yes."
"Then give me the chance."
"First tell me what you learned in those papers."
"You wish me to tell you the story the papers disclosed?"
"Yes."
Galt proceeded, and told all the facts in the career of Mme. Dubroski, just as they had been related to him by M. Armand. The woman listened with colorless face and starting eyes; and when Galt had concluded, she said:
"The tale unfolded by those papers is false; still, I wish to possess them."
"There is one way you can possess them."
"Speak."
"Return me to my hotel. The papers are concealed in my trunk."
"They are in your trunk?"
"Yes."
"Very well; I will find them when your fast is terminated."

"And you intend to carry out your scheme?"
"I do."
"I have nothing more to say."
"Do you not plead for your life?"
"Plead to one as false as Madame Dubroski? No, no; I prefer to die by slow starvation rather, and, dying, show my contempt for you."
"Look at the meal spread before you!"
"I see it."
"I asked you to eat?"
"Yes."
"You refused."
"I would refuse again."
"You fear poison; but no, that would be too speedy a death—you must die slowly. I am merciful; you shall have time to repent of all your wickedness during your life!"

"When will your time come, madame?"
"Good-bye, Everard Galt. Had you really loved you would not now be in your present position; you were false to me, and you pay the penalty!"

"I accept the penalty."
"Your courage does not fail you?"
"No."
"You are, indeed, a brave man; but you are not a match for me."

"You are not sure of that yet."
The woman cast on her victim a startled look.
"Do you mean to tell me you have hope?"
"With life there is hope!"
"Fool! Dismiss all hope from your mind! You are doomed! I have enjoyed this part of my revenge to my heart's content; and again, good-bye, we part now forever!"

The woman rang her bell, and the three men re-entered the room.

"To the dungeon with him!" she said.
The men seized the chair in which they had bound Galt. He did not open his mouth or utter one plea for mercy.

"You are still firm?" said the woman.
The man laughed in a merry tone.

Galt was carried from the room, carried down the stairs, and placed in a damp stone-walled vault; an iron door was closed and the Englishman, with a small lamp which gave just sufficient light to show him the horror of his position, was left alone.

"Well," he muttered, when once alone, "I am the victim of the freak of a handsome maniac; and it's lucky she did not catch me in this 'snap' before I was warned!"

After Galt had been carried from the room the madame sat down at the table and commenced to eat, and she was just pouring out some wine when the door of the room opened and Galt, with his mask drawn over his face, entered.

The woman uttered a piercing scream, rose from her seat and gazed with starting eyes. Galt, with a ghost-like step, crossed the room and, seating himself at the table, said in a hollow, sepulchral voice:

"I will sup with you!"
The madame summoned sufficient nerve and strength to ring the bell, and she did so violently: a moment passed, but there came no response to her ring.

Galt laughed in a hollow tone.

The woman rang again, but her only answer was the hollow laugh of her mysterious guest. She started to leave the room, when the command came:

"Do not attempt to leave the room, or I will kill you!"

The woman fell back in her seat.

"There, that is right; we will sup together; it is useless for you to ring; no one will come in answer to your summons until after our meal. Woman, you gave the command that I should be murdered in the vault! You did not expect I would come so soon in such questionable shape."

The woman sat silent, she was frozen with terror.

"Come, come, will you not finish your meal? eat heartily, madame, it is your last meal!"

The woman attempted to scream, but her voice failed her, and she sat and gazed with starting eyes.

"You had a surprise for me when I first entered here; you thought to surprise me when you removed your mask, but, as you remember, I was not at all surprised. Now I am going to surprise you when I remove my mask; did you ever hear of a skeleton under a mask? You have seen a picture, but you shall behold the reality, look!"

With a moan the woman closed her eyes, and when she opened them the mask had been returned, and she did not behold the ghastly sight she had been promised.

"You can kill me but once, madame, and now the game is in my hands; so come, we will eat and then talk business."

"Begone!" gasped the terrified woman.

"Bah! I have just come. I can not go. No, no, Agatha Raveili, we have a good deal to talk over before we end this *tête-à-tête*."

"Who are you?"

"Do you not recognize me?"

"You are not Galt?"

"Well, not Galt in the flesh. When your menials carried out your orders so well, do you dare hope I would come back to you as I left you?"

"Oh, what does this mean?"

"Can you not guess?" demanded the specter, still speaking with a hollow voice.

"Oh! spare me!" pleaded the woman.

"Spare you?"

"Yes, yes; spare me!"

"Have you ever spared any one? Come, will you save yourself?"

"I will save myself!"

"You have a chance."

"I will avail myself of it gladly."

"Are you sincere?"

"I am."

"Think well before you decide."

"Yes, yes; I will do anything, only spare me!"

"Where is Mademoiselle Dubroski?"

The woman uttered a scream.

"Why that question?"

"What other question could you expect?"

"Who are you?"

"Ah, you have not discerned."

"Who are you?"

"I told you I had a surprise for you when I removed my mask."

"Remove it."

"I will, Agatha, look; and if you choose, scream."

The mask was raised and the pale face of M. Armand was disclosed.

CHAPTER XXIII.

The detective had said, "scream, if you choose;" but the woman did not scream; she sat and gazed in silent wonder.

"At last!" said the detective.

The woman at length managed to articulate:

"Whence came you?"

"From the grave!"

"It's false! I have been deceived!"

"Ah! you have been deceived, eh? Well, that would be a pity, since you have always avoided deceit yourself."

The woman recovered her nerve, but the effect of fear and terror was still depicted upon her beautiful face.

"Monsieur Armand, you have played well your game."

"You do not fear the dead, madame?"

"No, I do not fear the dead—neither do I fear the living!"

"You are brave."

"Yes, I am brave. But how comes it that you are in this house?"

"Did you not know that some day we should sit face to face?"

"That is not answering my question."

"Bah! I could have entered your different homes a hundred times."

"I see all now; Everard Galt was your tool—he was playing into your hands all the time."

"Ah! that reminds me—where is my friend?"

"How do I know where your friend is? Why should you demand him at my hands?"

"You have not seen him recently?"

"I have not seen the wretch since he dared to make love to me."

M. Armand laughed.

"You may laugh, but I tell you I merely took pity on the fellow for awhile, and in some way he learned that you were my enemy, and he said to me he would protect me against you. But now I see through it all; you sent him to me, and it was from you he learned the tale he told me. Yes, yes; I see it all plain enough now."

"One word, Agatha. Have you not yet learned that it is ridiculous for you to attempt to deceive me?"

"I do not care to deceive you, since I no longer fear you."

"Ah! you no longer fear me?"

"No, sir. I do not know how you got into this house, but I am glad you are here."

"Really and truly glad, madame?"

"I am."

"And why are you so joyous over my visit?"

"You have run into a trap."

"Ah! I see; you would send me down to the vault, and murder me as you murdered poor Galt?"

The woman remained silent.

"Agatha Dubroski," said the detective, "your career is at last at an end. I did not come here alone. There is a gentleman waiting a signal from me who will serve you with a warrant."

A moan burst from the woman's lips, but in a moment she recovered voice to say:

"You dare not arrest me!"

"Yes, I dare arrest you for the murder of Everard Galt!"

"He is not dead."

M. Armand laughed.

"I tell you he is not dead!"

"Listen to me, Agatha: do you suppose I loved the Englishman? No, no; he had been engaged by you to murder me; well, I made a tool of him. He served my purpose. When he came to kill me I spared his life, but I knew that, when he had done his work, you would kill him, and I said to myself, 'Now I can avenge myself on this man, and at the same time get Agatha in my power. I will let it appear that I am dead, then all I have to do is watch. She will murder her accomplice and then I will have my revenge on both,' so I let the game go, as I promised Galt I would be on hand to save him at the last moment; that accounts for his coolness when you had him in your power; but I deceived him. I intended to let you murder him, so I would have the hold I required over you. I let your game go on. Everard Galt is dead; I had a witness to the murder; indeed, the assassin has already confessed that the murder was committed at your command, and now you are indeed in my power!"

The face of Mme. Dubroski was ghastly as the detective detailed his deep scheme.

"I am indeed in your power now!"

"Yes, you are in my power."

"You have played your game well, monsieur."

"Yes, I have played my game well!"

"And now you have come for your reward?"

"Yes, I have come for my reward."

"What do you demand?"

"Can you not guess?"

"You shall have half my wealth."

"I would not take one cent of your money; every coin is smeared with blood; every jewel has a crimson blush!"

"Will you take all my fortune?" asked the woman, in a low tone.

"No."

"Do you understand my proposition?"

"I do."

"You once professed to love me."

"Bah! that was merely the play of a detective. I was seeking to gain your confidence in order to obtain your secret."

"And you never loved me?"

"Could an honorable man love a woman who gained her fortune at the price of one husband's life?"

"Your charge is false!"

"I have not come here to discuss your former crimes; to-night's crime will serve my purpose."

"Once more—what seek you?"

"I demand the person of Mademoiselle Dubroski."

"And if I surrender the girl to you?"

"You can go your way."

"You cease to prosecute me?"

"Yes."

"I will never see your face again?"

"Never."

"How about her fortune?"

"That must be surrendered."

"My portion I can keep?"

"Yes."

A moment the woman appeared to be lost in deep thought, but after a time she said:

"Tell me truly: is Everard Galt dead?"

"You know that you gave an order for his death."

"But you did not permit him to be sacrificed."

"How do you know, madame?"

"You are not an assassin. I am sure he is not dead. If you permitted him to be killed after having led him into the game, you would be equally guilty with me. I know Monsieur Armand is a noble man; he does not sacrifice life to carry out a purpose."

"Well, we will admit that Galt lives."

"Ah! what means this? You admit the fact too readily."

"What would you have me do?"

"Tell me the real truth, monsieur."

"I am guiltless of his death."

"You have more to explain."

"I arrived too late to save his life."

"And he is dead?"

"Yes, he is dead."

"Which statement shall I believe?"

"You went once to gaze on my dead face; come and gaze on the dead face of the Englishman."

"No. And now, listen: am I to accept your word? If I surrender mademoiselle shall I be free?"

"If you comply with the other conditions."

"Surrender the property?"

"Yes, and furnish all the papers establishing her true identity."

"Then I am free?"

"Yes."

"I accept your conditions."

CHAPTER XXIV.

M. ARMAND's face did not express any particular satisfaction when the beautiful woman said: "I will accept your conditions." He knew well enough with whom he had to deal.

"Where is the girl?"

"She is not in this house."

"Then how can you surrender her to me?"

"We will go where she is."

"When?"

"At once."

"I am ready."

The woman rang her bell, but no one came in response to her summons.

"You have taken possession of this house?"

"Yes."

"You ring the bell."

The detective rang the bell, and a man entered the room.

"It is my servant I want," said the madame. M. Armand paid no attention to the madame's remark, but merely said to the man who had entered the room:

"You have your orders?"

"Yes, monsieur."

"All right, obey them."

The detective rose from the table, when Mme. Dubroski exclaimed:

"Hold, you have betrayed me!"

"No."

"Why do you go?"

"I go to search this house."

The woman fell back in her seat, and a smile actually spread over her ghastly face as she said:

"Proceed!"

The detective left the room, and half an hour passed, at the expiration of which time he appeared once more in the presence of Mme. Dubroski.

"Madame," he said, "I will withdraw for a few moments and give you time to prepare yourself for our journey."

"You go to-night?"

"Yes, according to your promise."

"You did not find the mademoiselle in this house?"

"Summon your servants, madame, and prepare to go with me. I must have the girl delivered to me to-night."

"We will go alone, monsieur."

"Why do we go alone?"

"It is my desire."

"Have you a carriage at your service?"

"You have, monsieur."

"Yes, I have."

"We will go in your conveyance."

The woman stepped to a chair on which lay her bonnet and cloak, and donning them, she said:

"I am ready."

A moment the detective stood and studied her face; it was evident that he had no confidence in her sincerity. He knew that she was up to some scheme.

"Are you ready, monsieur?"

"Yes, madame, but I have one word to say."

"I am listening."

"You know with whom you are dealing?"

"I do."

"And so do I, madame, and I believe you are planning some scheme! For your own sake, do not extend this play between us. I have all the points I need; you are in my power at last; you must surrender, and any little attempt on your part to evade the present position of affairs will only bring disaster upon yourself."

"I am prepared, monsieur, to surrender Lucille. I did not first conceive the conspiracy which has been carried out. I was but a passive actor."

Then why have you carried on the game so long?"

"It matters not that I should explain; you would not accept my explanation. It is enough that you have run a successful chase. I am beaten, and to-night I place the girl in your hands."

The woman and the detective left the room together; at the door stood a carriage which the lady entered.

"Where shall my man drive?"

"We will alight at —."

The woman named the corner of a certain street. The detective knew that the place named was near to the public apartments of Mme. Dubroski, and he gave the order to his coachman. The latter drove rapidly, and in due time halted at the appointed place. The detective and his companion alighted and proceeded toward the residence into which Galt had been introduced upon the night when he first volunteered to serve as the madame's champion.

A few moments later and M. Armand stood in the same apartment.

"Monsieur, you have no confidence in me even now?"

"Madame, we will not discuss that question."

"I have one word to say in my own defense. You will learn from Lucille's own lips that she has been treated with the consideration due a princess."

"I shall be glad to learn that such is the fact."

"Monsieur, wait here, and I will go and arouse the young lady and bring her to your presence."

"I await your coming, madame."

"You need not fear that I will attempt to es-

cape, monsieur," said the woman, as Armand stepped toward the door leading into the hall.

"I am not fearing your escape, madame; I have taken all necessary precautions; I have guarded against the possibility of such a dénouement."

Mme. Dubroski left the room and was absent fully twenty minutes, when she returned, accompanied by a female. The latter was slender of stature—not as tall as the princess—but she was closely veiled.

"Mademoiselle," said madame, "I present you to Monsieur Armand, one who claims to be your friend."

The veiled girl bent her head in acknowledgment of the introduction.

"You are to accompany Monsieur Armand; he is indeed your friend."

"I am ready," said the girl, under her veil.

The detective was somewhat dazed. The affair had taken a turn he had not anticipated. He did not understand the girl's readiness to accompany him. His suspicions were aroused, and he said:

"Will the young lady please remove her veil?"

"You must trust me, monsieur."

"Madame, do you think I can be fooled so easily?"

"What does monsieur suspect?"

"The identity of that young lady."

"How can Monsieur Armand establish the identity of Mademoiselle Dubroski?—he never saw her."

"I can establish her identity."

"Satisfactorily to yourself?"

"Yes."

"You are sure, monsieur?"

"I am sure."

"It is strange that you have so little confidence in me."

"We will not waste words, madame."

"I have a great surprise for you, monsieur."

"Undoubtedly."

"You have suspected a trick?"

"I frankly admit I am on my guard."

"I knew it, but I shall prove my word good. I promised to surrender mademoiselle into your hands. I have done more—I have persuaded her to accompany you, otherwise no human power could tear her from my side. I have told her she will be safe with you, and I have told her that in going with you she saves my life, and the latter is the only inducement that prevails."

The detective remained silent. He was fully satisfied in his own mind that the madame was playing a deep game; indeed, he had suspected from the start that she was carrying out some cunning scheme.

"The young lady will accompany you, monsieur."

"I must see her face."

"You insist?"

"I do."

"Ah, well, I enjoy this scene, monsieur; it is the most enjoyable moment of my life! You and I have played a farce under cover of a tragedy. I know that Everard Galt lives; I know that you have no power over me, and yet I have determined to surrender this girl into your hands! Monsieur, behold!"

The madame raised the veil which covered the young lady's face, and M. Armand uttered a cry of amazement.

CHAPTER XXV.

M. ARMAND had possessed himself of a photograph of Lucille Dubroski; the picture had been taken when the child was about thirteen, and he felt himself competent to judge as to her identity, and when the veil was raised Mme. Dubroski stood revealed.

A smile of triumph played over the face of the princess.

"You thought," she said, "I meant to deceive you."

"Madame, I am always on my guard."

"You are now satisfied as to the identity of this dear child?"

"I am."

"You see she is happy!"

"She appears to be happy."

"And you have been pursuing me all these years only to regain possession of Lucille?"

"I think I can admit that much."

"I wish I had known your purpose sooner."

"Why?"

"I had no purpose in secreting Lucille; it was I who saved her life; you have been deceived concerning my motives and actions."

"What did you suspect was my motive in following you?"

"We will not speak of the past now; there has been a misunderstanding all round."

"Will you explain?"

"You think it was a conspiracy between myself and my father to rob this dear child?"

"Yes."

"What I did was to save her life and her fortune. I am sure I had no desire to rob her; both our fortunes are ample."

"One would think so."

"Did you know that Lucille had other relatives?"

"I did not."

"Did you know that, in case of her death, her fortune went to others?"

"I did not."

"Such is the fact; and there was a conspiracy on hand to murder the girl, by these relatives, and we carried out our scheme to save her."

M. Armand was surprised at what he heard, and he was compelled to admit that there were certain incidents that favored the tale told by the princess.

"I will be glad to prove your statements true," he said.

"My statements are true. And now, will you leave Lucille with me?"

"Why should I?"

"She desires to remain with me; and, strictly speaking, you have no right to take her from under my care and protection. You have obtained a certain power over me that compels me to yield to your demands. You are now satisfied that the child has not been murdered—you are now satisfied that I am her friend. Why should you take her from me?"

"I may determine to return her to your care."

"Monsieur Armand, you have done me a great wrong. All these years you have compelled me to scheme against your life; but all the time I was only acting in self-defense."

"What did you believe concerning me?" asked the detective.

"I believed you were acting in the interests of Lucille's relatives."

A shadow passed over the detective's face. He knew that the latter statement was false; and, if one statement was false, he had reason to doubt all the statements the woman had made.

"I can not leave Lucille with you."

"But I shall have the privilege of seeing her?"

"Certainly."

"The girl is surrendered?"

"Yes."

"I have fulfilled my part of our agreement?"

"Yes."

"You from hence permit me to go in peace?"

"As soon as I am satisfied that the girl's fortune is safe."

"Her fortune is safe; and now tell me where is Everard Galt?"

"Do you wish to see him?"

"No; but I wish to be assured of his safety. You accused me of having ordered his death; you know I did not."

"Mr. Galt is safe."

"And he is free?"

"Yes, he is free."

"I did not mean to keep him in that vault only until I had a chance to flee from America. I believed you dead."

"You really believed me dead?"

"I did."

"I did not anticipate deceiving you so easily."

"I was deceived."

"And you rejoiced at my death?"

"I certainly did; you have pursued me for a number of years, and I could not but rejoice to know that you were dead."

"Will this young lady accompany me?"

"She will accompany you."

"Willingly."

"Under the circumstances, yes."

"To-morrow, madame, we will meet and talk matters over."

"Yes, to-morrow we will meet."

"Come, we will go," said the detective, addressing Lucille.

The girl offered no objection, and followed the detective from the room and the house. They entered the carriage at the door and were driven to the house where the combat had taken place between Galt and the detective.

The latter was considerably perplexed. He knew that something wrong was going on. He knew that he had not won such an easy victory over the princess. He knew that the woman was not the person to surrender so easily and

gracefully, and he determined to be on his guard. One thing was assured: it was indeed Lucille Dubroski who had been surrendered to him.

It was nearly daylight when the detective reached his home, and once in his own apartments, he determined to hold a talk with Lucille.

"My child," he said, "do you believe me to be your friend?"

"Yes."

"Were you well treated by Madame Dubroski?"

"No."

The detective gave a start.

"Did you not admit in her presence that you were?"

"I did."

"Why did you do so?"

"I was afraid to say otherwise."

"And you were not well treated?"

"I have been her slave; and had you been out of the way she would have destroyed me."

"You think so?"

"I know it."

"And have you been aware that I was on this woman's track?"

"Yes."

"How did you learn the facts?"

"I overheard conversations when she was not aware that I was a listener."

"Suppose I had determined to leave you in her charge?"

"I knew you would not."

"And you were really glad to come away with me?"

"It was the happiest moment of my life."

"And she has ill-treated you?"

"No; but I have been aware, all the time, of her designs."

"And you are satisfied that it was only her fear of me that prevented her from putting you out of the way?"

"Yes."

"How has she managed to conceal you all these years?"

"By making me appear in male attire."

"You were not in male attire when you came over in the steamer?"

"No; she bribed the captain, and had everything arranged for my concealment on board. I was permitted to go on deck only occasionally at night."

"And you are glad to be with me?"

"Yes; I am glad."

"Enough! In a few days we will investigate matters, and, in the meantime, remember you are safe—fear nothing."

"I thank you. I am happy and hopeful now."

The detective believed the girl was telling him the truth.

CHAPTER XXVI.

It was late in the afternoon when M. Armand called at the apartments of Madame Dubroski. He held a long talk with her and everything appeared satisfactory on the surface, and yet he was dissatisfied. There was something in the wind that he could not understand.

From the apartments of the madame he proceeded to the hotel where Galt stopped. The two men held a long consultation.

We will here explain that Galt knew all the time while at the table with the princess that the detective was in the house. Matters had been arranged, and when Galt entered the carriage with the *incognita* four sharp men were on hand. The carriage was followed, and M. Armand and his assistants entered and took possession of the house. A signal was passed to Galt and the men who entered the room and bound him had received their cue. They were at that moment acting under the orders of the detective. Their reward was to be nothing, and their failure was to be death. The men took in the situation and were silent and performed their work.

M. Armand, after his consultation with Galt, spent some time in making certain investigations, and it was after night-fall when he returned to his own house. He ascended to the second floor and entered the room where he expected to find Lucille and her keeper. He found the latter; but there was no Lucille present, and he found the keeper in a plight which caused a curse to fall from his lips.

M. Armand had left the girl in charge of the mysterious woman, his skillful aid, the same who had inveigled Galt to the house the night of the duel, and when he returned he found his

faithful ally bound hand and foot and gagged, lying upon the floor of the room.

It took the detective but an instant to release his assistant, but it was some moments before the woman could speak; and when she did find voice, she told a strange story.

"How did all this occur?" asked the detective.

"Monsieur, for once you have been outwitted!"

"Tell me all."

"The girl Lucille is but an accomplice of the woman Madame Dubroski."

"How do you know?"

"You had not been gone half an hour from this house this afternoon, when three men entered; the girl showed signs of delight when they entered the room, and herself gave the orders to have me bound and gagged."

M. Armand was indeed outwitted. He was really knocked all out.

"What more have you to tell?"

"Nothing more. I was bound and gagged, and the girl went off with the men."

"No violence was done to you?"

"No."

The shrewd detective, the man possessed of almost superhuman intelligence, was, for once, completely dumfounded. A woman had played him after all, and had beaten him—yea, beaten him at his own game!

A moment the baffled man sat and considered. He drew from his pocket a photograph, and examined it thoroughly.

"There can be no mistake," he muttered; "it was the girl Lucille that I brought here; but, after all, it appears that she must have been in collusion with the princess."

The detective left the house, and entering his carriage, drove direct to the residence of Madame Dubroski. He rang the bell, but there came no answer; the apartments were dark, and there were no signs of the presence of any one.

The detective descended to the sidewalk and stood a moment considering what he should do, when a miserable-looking tramp approached him.

"Are you looking for the foreign woman?"

"Who are you?" demanded the detective.

"Oh, I'm nobody."

"What do you want?"

"Nothing; I thought you wanted something."

"What did you think I wanted?"

"I thought you wanted to know where the parties went who lived here."

"You thought so, eh?"

"Yes."

"What made you think so?"

"I'm no fool."

"Oh, I thought you were."

"No, sir; I've been on the lay here for you."

"For me?"

"Yes."

"Talk plain, my friend."

"I'm talking plain."

"Who am I?"

"I don't know."

"And yet you were looking for me?"

"Yes. I'll tell you. I saw those people getting away in a hurry. I'm a rounder, always on the lookout for a pick-up. Says I to myself, those people are getting away in a hurry; they're expecting some one; I'll just dog 'em, and when I find out where they're going, I'll come back here and lay for the party they're getting away from. I saw you come to the house and try to get in, and says I, here's my man; and that's how I was waiting for you, and don't know who you are."

The man's story was straight and reasonable.

"You saw the people going away?"

"Yes."

"How did they go?"

"In two lots."

"You saw both lots?"

"Yes."

"Well, what did they look like?"

"Two men and two women went together, and then two women and one man skipped."

"Which party went first?"

"The two men and two women went first."

"Where did they go?"

"I do not know."

"I thought you followed them?"

"No."

"Then what good are you to me?"

"I didn't follow the first party."

"What did you do?"

"I followed the last party."

"What time elapsed between the two departures?"

"A few minutes only."

"And you followed the last party?"
"Yes."
"Do you know where they went?"
"Yes."
"And you think I want to find them?"
"Yes."
"Suppose I do?"
"I can take you to where they went."
"All right; we will go."
"Not so fast."
"Well, what is it?"
"I do not work for nothing."
"Oh, you expect pay? How much?"
"I leave that to you."
"Have we far to go?"
"Yes."
"In what direction?"
"I might give you a clew, and you would not need my services."
"I will pay you twenty dollars if you will guide me to where the last party went."
"I can do it. I will show you the house where I saw them enter."
"That is enough; that is all I want."
"Will you pay me now?"
"No; when you have performed the service."
"All right, come along."
The tramp moved off, taking a lead downtown, and at last came to a halt in one of the worst neighborhoods of the city. He started to go through an alley-way leading to a rear building.
"Where are you going?"
"They went in there."
"They did, eh?"
"Yes."
"Well, hold on, my friend, I want a word with you."
"Speak out, sir."
"You were sent to guide me here?"
"No, sir."
The detective drew a pistol, clapped it to the man's head, and said:
"Now confess or die!"

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE man did not exhibit either fear or surprise, but demanded, coolly:
"Hello! what's up now?"
"Do you think you fooled me?"
"Well, now, this is queer! Do I think I fooled you?"
"That's my question."
"Well, mister, I've only one thing to say: what could I make to fool you? and who would send me to guide you here?"
"That is what I am asking you."
"Well, all my answer, mister, is that I'm straight. I saw the party come here, and I'm bringing you to the house."
"All right, lead on; I've got matters set in order, and if you attempt any game, you will not get away, no matter who else may escape."
"I've no game to play, and I'm willing to take all the chances; but, look here, you can fall out from this trail if you want to, mister."
"No; I'll chance your honesty now as I've got everything well fixed."
"Shall we go ahead?"
"Yes."
"Well, rack your gun, mister, or you'll excite some suspicion around here; we are in a bad neighborhood."
The detective put his pistol away and released his hold of the guide.
"Now lead on, and show me the place."
The man took a few steps forward, and, upon reaching the end of the alley, said:
"That is the house; the party went in there, and I followed to the rear room on the top floor; and now, if you will give me my money, I will get away."
"I can not pay you any money until I have satisfied myself that you are not deceiving me."
"You still run on the racket that I am fooling you?"
"I do not mean to be fooled out of twenty dollars."
"See here; give me your address and name, the place where I can meet you to-morrow. I tell you are a gentleman and will pay all that when satisfied that I did not deceive you."
The detective named a place where the man could meet him on the following day, and the fellow departed.

M. Armand entered the house, but did not ascend the stairs. He stood in the hall-way fully ten minutes, when he issued forth and cau-

tiously passed, to the main street. He saw a man stationed on the opposite sidewalk and in answer to a signal the man approached
"Ah, you are here?"
"On deck."
"Alone?"
"Yes."
"Hasten for aid and return here; I am satisfied a scheme is intended."
The man glided away, and the detective returned and took up a position in the alleyway; half an hour passed and he saw a man dodging on the opposite side of the street.
"Ah, ha!" muttered M. Armand, and he receded far back into the alley; a few moments passed, and the man who had been upon the opposite side of the street stealthily stole over and sneaked into the alley, but he had proceeded a few feet when he fell forward upon his face, and upon scrambling to his feet discovered that he had fallen over a man who had evidently been lying asleep in the passage.
"Hallo! who are you kicking?" exclaimed the man over whom the groper had stumbled.
"I didn't kick you; I fell over you! what are you doing, stretched out here in the dark?"
"Well, who are you, anyhow?"
"None of your business."
"I believe you're one of 'em!" said the man, rising to his feet and peering into the face of the fellow he had upset.
The latter gazed at the former, and recognized in him a miserably clad beggar.
"What do you mean?" demanded number one, the man who had taken the fall.
"I believe you are one of 'em!" answered number two, the fellow who had been stretched upon the ground.
"You believe I am one of them?"
"Yes."
"See here; tell me just what you are getting at."
"Take my advice, and leave; the police will be here pretty soon; a woman's gone to the station."
"What have I got to do with the police?"
"I believe you are one of the gang."
"What gang?"
"Oh, you know well enough."
"I came here to find a friend who lives in this house."
"You came to find a friend?"
"Yes."
"Well, let me tell you there's been a terrible fight up there in that house on the top floor back room, and it is my idea a man has been killed."
"A man killed!"
"Yes."
"What makes you think so?"
"Well, I'll tell you. I live on the first floor of that house, and about an hour ago two men came here, and one of them went into the house, went upstairs to the back room on the top floor and all was still for about ten minutes, and then a row commenced and I ran up and I heard groans, and I came down and I sent the old woman to tell the police, and they will be here in a few moments, unless the old woman's got lost. She was pretty full when she started."
The man started toward the house when suddenly number two exclaimed:
"Here they come! Here come the police!"
Number one ran back and started through the alley-way, and in the passage ran against several men. The latter let him go on; they had received a signal.
As the man gained the street M. Armand, who had been transformed into number two, suddenly changed back to his proper self, and addressing a few words to the leader of the men started to the street.
He saw number one walking rapidly away and the detective started in pursuit.
M. Armand had been fooled once, but he was playing a shrewd game to recover the ground he had lost. He conceived that he saw through the scheme that was being worked, and he was set to beat the game.
The man whom the detective had started to follow proceeded to Broadway up which he went for some distance, when he turned down a side street, and a few moments later entered a hotel kept by an Italian, a regular *trattoria* and *pension* combined. When the man entered the house the detective was close at his heels, and M. Armand was on the stairs when the fellow entered an apartment on the third floor.
As the man disappeared in the room a woman appeared. The detective spoke a few words to her in Italian, and slipped a twenty-dollar gold piece into her hand. The money acted like

a charm; the woman was at his service for all that she could do, and an instant later the detective was noiselessly admitted into a room adjoining the one where the man had entered. There was a connecting door between the two apartments, and the bolt was on the side where the detective was concealed.

M. Armand's face was all ugly. As a rule it was cold and impassive, but upon this occasion it brightened up. He glanced through the key-hole, and a sight met his gaze that caused his face to shine with even greater delight. He had struck the right clew; he had indeed tumbled to the scheme. It was Mme. Dubroski whom he beheld in the adjoining room.

The scheming woman was dressed in the plainest manner. Her veil was thrown aside, disclosing her face, which was pale and wore an agitated look.

At the moment the detective glanced into the room, the man whom he had trailed had just finished relating his adventures, and M. Armand overheard the madame remark:

"It is strange I do not receive word direct."

"You will, in good time, madame," muttered the detective, in a pleased tone.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

"MADAME," said the man, "there is no question that at last your enemy is out of the way."

"I will not believe it until I have gazed upon his dead face, until I have made sure that he is dead, dead, never to rise again and pursue me! But you tell me the police were there at the time you left?"

"Yes; I met them as I was fleeing from the place."

Mme. Dubroski walked the floor to and fro for a few moments, and seemed to be laboring under great excitement; and as she walked, she exclaimed:

"This is my last chance! If I fail this time, the man triumphs over me!"

An hour passed, and no news came to Mme. Dubroski, and she said:

"You must go again and see if you can learn any facts. I will meet you two hours from now."

The woman left the room and M. Armand followed her. She did not take a carriage, but walked, although it was after eleven o'clock.

The woman proceeded to a handsome residence, distant about ten minutes' walk from the *pension*, and entered the house with a night-key.

The house was a place that had been advertised to be let, furnished. M. Armand, through a singular coincidence, had had his attention called to the place, and he at once decided that Mme. Dubroski had become the lessee. The detective had no method of getting into houses, and it did not take him long to force an entrance into the house in question.

No light burned in the hall, and he was compelled to grope his way to the second floor, where he recognized a light as burning in one of the rooms.

"Well," he muttered, "I think I have at last tracked this woman to her last refuge. This night settles the matter between us forever."

He knelt down and peeped through the key-hole, and at once his heart stood still.

Mme. Dubroski had removed her street wraps and sat in a large chair, and at her feet knelt a beautiful girl.

The girl was a perfect picture of the photograph which the detective held, only that she was a few years older; but the resemblance was perfect, and she was not the same girl that the detective had taken to his house as Lucille.

"What mystery is this?" he mentally exclaimed.

The girl and the madame were talking.

"Yes," said the latter, "in a few days, Lucille, we will return to Russia."

"Oh, mamma, I am so glad to hear you make that declaration!"

The girl spoke in French, as did Mme. Dubroski.

"You really wish to return, Lucille?"

"Yes."

"Are you not happy with me?"

"Must I speak frankly?"

"Certainly."

"I will be happier to return to Russia."

"Why are you so anxious to return to Russia?"

"I can not put my reason in words; but I

long to return. I wish to see my many good friends again."

"You do not love me, Lucille?"

The girl remained silent.

"Do you not look upon me as your friend?"

The girl still remained silent.

"I fear some one has whispered words to you that have led you to look upon me as your enemy."

"No one has ever said one word against you in my hearing."

"You are sure?"

"I am sure; no one would dare speak against you!"

"And yet you will not say that you consider me your friend?"

Again the girl failed to make answer.

The detective could see plainly the faces of both, and he read a tigerish expression on the countenance of Mme. Dubroski.

"You can go away now, Lucille, to-morrow we will speak again of our return to Russia."

The girl rose to leave the room; she did not offer to kiss her mamma.

"You do not offer to kiss me."

The girl put up her lips, but the detective observed a shudder pass over her delicate frame as the kiss was exchanged.

The woman, when alone, commenced to pace the floor, and from time to time mutterings fell from her lips:

"I would I were sure that delicate flower would fade away! would that I had left her in the tomb of her fathers! In saving her life I have made a fugitive of myself, and I have invited this terrible man to follow me the world over! I see now his object. I have been mistaken all these years; it was this girl he was seeking; had she been dead he would not have pursued me. Oh, that this last attempt to rid myself of him may prove a success! but, alas, I should not be surprised were he to walk right into my presence this moment!"

As the woman spoke the door of the room opened, and M. Armand entered.

The madame stood like one transfixed.

"You here?" she muttered, in a husky voice.

"Yes, I am here; and you are not surprised; you just said you would not be."

"And you overheard my words?"

"I did."

"Terrible man, you have won at last."

"Yes; I have won at last."

"You saw who was with me a moment ago?"

"Yes, I saw her."

"And you recognized her?"

"I did."

"And you now know that I tricked you with the other lady?"

"Yes, I know that you tricked me."

"It must be that I have all these years had a traiter in my own household."

"No, madame, you made a good selection of servants, but you were not equal to playing a game against me; and now I wish to ask you a few questions."

"I am at your mercy, speak; but can you believe anything I may tell you?"

"I will know just how to measure your words; but who was the lady whom you palmed off on me as Lucille?"

"Can you not guess?"

"No."

"Did you know Lucille had a sister?"

"I did not."

"The young lady is a half sister to Lucille; my husband was not married to the mother of the girl who went to your house."

"And she was prepared to aid you in your game?"

"Yes."

"Madame, this part of your game has not been well played."

"My plans were all right, but an accident prevented their success."

"And your attempt to dispose of me was a second thought?"

"No."

"You intended to have me put out of the way?"

"I did."

"And you coolly confess it?"

"Yes; why should I deny it?"

"And now what are your plans?"

"I have no plans; I am at your disposal."

"Will you summon Lucille?"

"Certainly; but now as you have the real heiress what hope have I, monsieur?"

"We will talk of your hopes later on. I am only too glad to have at last found mademoiselle."

"I will go and bring her to you."

"No, madame."

"What would you have me do?"

"Summon her."

"And why not go and bring her to you?"

"I prefer that you summon her."

A moment the woman fixed her eyes upon the detective, then suddenly she drew a stiletto from her bosom and raised it aloft, and one word fell from her lips.

CHAPTER XXIX.

"DEATH!" ejaculated Mme. Dubroski, and she made a plunge with the knife pointed toward her own bosom. The detective, however, was too quick for her, and the knife was wrested from her grasp.

The woman stood pale and with gleaming eyes as she said:

"Do you deny me the poor privilege of death?"

"Why should you die?"

"I am baffled and beaten."

"But you are young and beautiful."

"Oh, yes, it well becomes you to flatter me now since you have gained the game."

"And my vow is fulfilled; and now, Agatha, I can talk to you plainly."

"You certainly have talked to me plainly every time it has been your fortune to talk to me at all."

"I have a strange revelation to make."

The madame glanced at the detective in a peculiar manner as she said:

"You have a revelation to make to me?"

"Yes."

"I am ready to listen."

"I do not desire that you should die."

"Oh, no, you wish to return me to Europe, place me face to face with my crimes, as you call them, gain more renown at my expense, and then let me go."

"No, I do not wish to force you to return to Europe; if you return it will be a voluntary decision. I have accomplished all that I set out to perform since I have proved that the girl lives."

"But you have not made a revelation."

"I am prepared to do so."

"And I am prepared to listen."

"To-morrow I will tell you a strange story, and now listen: you have no need to fear me. I will prove myself to be your friend."

"You will prove yourself to be my friend?"

"Yes."

"Never!"

"You do not know what a wonderful story I have to tell you."

"I am prepared to listen to your wonderful story."

"To-morrow you shall hear my strange tale."

"To-morrow will be too late."

"You are determined to destroy yourself?"

"Yes."

"Why?"

"I have no confession to make."

"I may make a confession for you."

"Do so."

"You love the Count Verrasci?"

The madame turned deathly pale.

"Ah! I have spoken the truth; you fear I will make the story of your crimes public; you fear the count will learn the truth and will hate you."

The woman's face was absolutely ghastly in its appearance.

"You know the count is an honorable man; you know he will refuse to wed a guilty woman, and you love him so intensely as to prefer death to the loss of his love?"

"Monsieur Armand, you are more than human."

"Oh, no, I am only a man trained to my business. I study small details and learn all the facts in the career of parties whom I may be 'piping.' It was no great task to learn that you loved the count."

Mme. Dubroski gazed at the strange, wonderful man before her in dumb amazement.

"It is strange, madame, that, being possessed of a love so true, so intense, so sincere, you could meditate crime!"

"Monsieur Armand, will you tell me how you became possessed of my secret? Are you acquainted with the Count Verrasci?"

"I became possessed of your secret in a very simple manner."

"From the lips of the Count Verrasci himself?"

"No, madame."

"It must be so."

"I swear, madame, it was not the Count Verrasci who revealed the secret to me."

The beautiful woman still gazed with a dumbfounded look upon the extraordinary man.

"The count told his tale to some one of your agents, and he repeated it to you!"

"No, madame."

"It must be so, as no other living soul knew of the fact of our betrothal, save the count and myself."

"Have you never confessed your love to any one?"

"Never to a living soul."

"Listen, madame; you met the count at Baden-Baden?"

"I did."

"There was at Baden-Baden, at the time, an enemy?"

"Yes."

"This man possessed your secret?"

"He did."

"He threatened you?"

"He did."

"He was seeking to compel you to marry him?"

"It is true."

Each time as the beautiful woman made an assenting answer to the detective's revelations, her agitation and wonderment became more and more apparent.

"One night in the gardens this enemy assailed you?"

"He did."

"You screamed for help?"

"Yes."

"The Count Verrasci appeared as the rescuer?"

"He did."

"That same night the count and this man fought a duel?"

"So I was informed."

"The count killed your enemy?"

"So I believe."

"The man did not reveal your secret. He died without telling his tale."

"Did he tell it to you, monsieur?" demanded the madame, in a suspicious tone.

"No, no, madame; I know that he never told his tale to the count."

"Monsieur, this is indeed extraordinary. It is really marvelous that you should possess yourself of all these facts."

"Let me proceed with my tale."

"Proceed, monsieur."

"You and the count afterward met. The count did not tell you of the duel, but you learned the facts through one of your agents."

"It is indeed true."

"The count was afterward much in your company, and he won your love."

"He did."

"He told you that there was a reason why he could not wed you, and he bound you to a compact to conceal the engagement."

"Oh, monsieur, what you tell me is, indeed, all true!"

"The count split a ring with you?"

"He did."

"He told you that he had a sacred vow to fulfill, and afterward he would seek you out; and, pointing to a fountain, he said to you: 'Agatha, if, when we meet again, you can come to me as pure as yonder crystal water, I will wed you and love you, and the ring shall be joined and shall be your wedding circlet.'"

"Again, monsieur, I say this is marvelous!"

"Madame, you know that if the count becomes possessed of your secret he will despise you."

"Yes, yes!"

"You knew that I was the only man left on earth who held your secret, and you have sought to kill me."

"I was at your mercy."

"Answer me one question. Why did you seek my life?"

"Because you possessed my secret."

"It was not that you might rob Lucille of her fortune?"

"As I live, I saved the child's life!"

"Why did you save her life?"

"Because she was pure and innocent, and I did not wish to see her sacrificed. The scheme to murder her was my father's, and it was my scheme to save her."

"Were you not a party to your husband's murder?"

"I was not."

"You swear?"

"I do."

A strange look came to the detective's face, but he remained silent and thoughtful.

CHAPTER XXX.

"**W**HEN the detective spoke again he said,
"Do you really love the Count Verrasci?"
You know so much concerning me you
at to know the facts as to my love."

"Hardly; one may profess certain things
to be false in their professions."

"What difference does it make to you, mon-
sieur, whether I love the count or not?"

"It does make a difference."

"How?"

"I have told you I have a revelation to
make."

"And I have said I was prepared to listen to
your revelation."

"Did it ever cross your mind that the count
already knew your history?"

"Ah, you have dealt me a blow in that direction,"
exclaimed the princess with quivering lip.

"I swear I never revealed one word to the
count; and now, madame, is it possible that
you can accept me as a friend and trust me?"

"Monsieur!" ejaculated the beautiful woman.

"It does seem a strange request, but stranger
events have happened; indeed, although I know
that you have sought to murder me, I wish to
become your friend."

"This is all very strange, monsieur."

"It is strange, but true."

"Could I believe in your friendship for me,
you who have pursued me as man never pur-
sued woman, you who refused half my fortune
to spare me, you from whom I have fled from
one land to another—can I believe that you
really wish to become my friend?"

"I do wish to become your friend."

"Monsieur, this is but one of your tricks, one
of your strategic schemes; you have a purpose
in seeking my friendship."

"Yes, I have a purpose."

"You must hate me, and your purpose must
be inimical to my happiness."

"Agatha, you know I am an honorable man;
you have testified to my honor. I refused half
your fortune, and that fact proves that my mo-
tive in pursuing you was not a sinister one; it
proves that I was devoted to a principle that
money could not divert me from; if ever a
woman could trust a man's word, you can trust
mine!"

"And what would you have me do?"

"Permit me to become your friend."

"And if I permit you to become my friend?"

"I may promise you future happiness despite
your past career."

"Your words are all very strange, mon-
sieur."

"Stranger events have occurred than that
you and I should become friends!"

"And if we become friends?"

"Then you will trust me."

"And if I trust you?"

"You will tell me naught but the truth."

"And what can I tell you?"

"Everything concerning yourself. Confess
to me wherein you have sinned, and to what ex-
tent you have repented."

"This is, indeed, a strange desire on your
part."

"When I make the promised revelation, the
desire will not appear so strange."

"You desire that I shall confess to you all the
sins of my life?"

"Yes."

"You desire to act as a sort of father confess-
or?"

"Yes."

"I might deceive you."

"I should know it."

"Then you confess to supernatural power?"

"No; I only confess to a well and thor-
oughly developed natural gift."

"And that gift is—?"

"A keen observation and extraordinary pow-
ers of perception. I know enough of your life
to be able to balance your story with what I
know, and I should soon perceive whether you
were telling me the truth or not."

"And if I shall tell you the truth?"

"An extraordinary surprise awaits you."

"I accept your proposition. I am at your
mercy now. I can not imperil myself by a full
confession?"

"No; you can not; listen to me; no matter
what your crimes have been I will not use a
knowledge of them against you in any way."

"Monsieur, you know all the crimes I have
committed."

"I do?"

"Yes."

"Explain."

"I have committed but one crime in all my
life."

"And that crime was—"

"Against yourself."

"Did you not meditate taking the life of
Everard Galt?"

"I did not."

"But suppose he had really killed me?"

"His life was safe."

"What was your intention concerning him?"

"I should have bribed him."

"Then why did you arrange for his incarceration
in the vault in your house on the river
bank?"

"I did not intend taking his life."

"What did you mean to do?"

"Teach him the danger of being my foe, and
then I should have bribed him."

"But suppose he had refused a bribe?"

"If he had pursued me as you have pursued
me, I should have been compelled, in self-de-
fense, to place him beyond doing me harm."

"Had you decided upon any plan for such a
contingency?"

"I had not."

The detective proceeded to enumerate a num-
ber of tragic acts in which Mlle. Ravelli was
supposed to have been implicated, and the beau-
tiful woman denied her guilt, and, proceeding,
said:

"Monsieur, my father was a wicked man,
and I was trained by him from early infancy;
but, as I live, I always revolted against the
commission of crime, and saved many a
doomed life. I would have saved the life of my
husband, had it been in my power."

"Is what you tell me true?"

"Yes, it is true."

"And you would even now prefer to lead a
pure and sinless life?"

"No, I would prefer to die."

"To die?"

"Yes."

"Why?"

"I will confess I love the Count Verrasci;
love as intensely as though I were not the
adopted daughter of the chemist Ravelli; as
purely, as madly, as though I were a maiden
reared in the purest of homes!"

The detective had given a start when the
beautiful woman had spoken of herself as the
adopted daughter of the chemist Ravelli.

"Madame," he said, "you have named one
fact that I had never discovered."

"You believed me to be the real daughter of
Ravelli?"

"Yes."

"I was not; after his death I discovered cer-
tain papers containing disclosures of a startling
nature concerning myself."

"And you were not his child?"

"No."

"Did he inform you as to your real parent-
age?"

"Yes."

"And you were honorably born?"

"He purchased me from my parents when I
was less than a year old."

"And your parents were?"

"Peasants."

"Are they living?"

"They are dead."

"You have ascertained the fact?"

"Yes."

"Have you any brothers or sisters?"

"Not a living relation."

"Agatha, I am glad that you confided in me."

"And will you now make your revelation?"

"Yes."

CHAPTER XXXI.

A MOMENT the detective paced the room, but
at length he stopped and fixed his strange pierc-
ing eyes upon the princess.

"Look at me," he said.

She fixed her eyes upon him.

"It is strange," he said, "that you have
never had a suspicion."

The beautiful woman trembled; she appeared
to discern what was coming.

"You suspect nothing?" he said.

"Nothing," came the answer.

"Look at me well."

"Monsieur, you must make your revelation;

I can discern nothing."

"No suspicion of the truth has ever crossed
your mind?"

"I have never indulged a suspicion such as
has not been disclosed concerning you."

"Agatha, I love you!"

The woman's face was like marble, and her
eyes expressed terror. She remained silent.

"You hear what I say, madame?"

"I do."

"And what is your answer?"

"I am sorry."

"You do not love me?"

"I do not love you."

"You can not love me?"

"I can not."

"You love Verrasci?"

"Why compel me to declare my love for
another to you?"

"You will marry Verrasci?"

"Never!"

"You will not marry him?"

"Never! Why ask?"

"Simply because I would know your reason
for the declaration."

"The confession of your love will ever serve
as a barrier between the count and myself."

"Why?"

"I know you well, know how relentless you
are."

"Madame, you are mistaken."

"Am I to understand that you will not be-
come my enemy?"

"I will not become your enemy."

"You will throw no obstacle between myself
and the count."

"On the contrary, I will do all in my power
to make you happy with the count."

"Monsieur, this is marvelous."

"No, it is not marvelous. Since you can no
longer love me I will prove my love for you."

"Such disinterestedness, monsieur, I can
not believe in."

"You shall believe in it; and now, listen, I
have another revelation to make."

"Ah, what am I to hear now?"

"The count has his secret."

"Indeed?"

"He has deceived you."

"Ah, then you confess that you are ac-
quainted with the count?"

"I know of him in my pursuit of you. I
studied every one with whom you came in con-
tact."

"And you have spoken with the count?"

"Since I have been in America, yes."

The beautiful woman displayed greater agita-
tion than upon any former occasion. She reeled
toward a seat, the blood forsaking her face, and it
appeared as though life were about to depart
from her body.

A moment she struggled with her agitation,
and indeed it was some time before she man-
aged to articulate.

"The Count Verrasci is in America?"

"He is."

"And you have seen him? and he knows of
my presence in America?"

"He came to America because you were
here."

"Oh, how you have deceived me! what a
bitter revenge you are exacting, monsieur! but
you shall only triumph in a manner that will
afford you but a brief satisfaction."

"Madame, did I not seek your friendship?"

"Ah, yes, so that you might stab me the
deeper."

"I am your friend: I am a man of my word,
and when I claim to be a friend I do not pre-
pose to act as an enemy. You appear to look
upon the announcement of Count Verrasci's
presence in New York as a menace to you?"

"When the announcement of his presence
here comes from you, I do."

"Listen to me and be patient; you can trust
your happiness to me."

"After your declaration of love? No, no,
monsieur, I can not be deceived. I know what
sacrifices love will make. I know to what bitter
ends disappointed love will drive a man for
revenge. I am not deceived; but listen to me;
swear to conceal all my past life from Count
Verrasci, and if you desire it I will become
your wife."

"Why would you conceal all your past from
the count?"

"I would spare him the bitterness of learning
that he had loved an unworthy woman."

"And you would give me an example of one
of the sacrifices a pure love can prompt?"

"I would."

"Madame, the count already knows your
history."

"Ah! you have revealed to him all!"

"I have not revealed one word to him; but
let me tell you, the count has this secret. He
has deceived you."

"Deceived me?"

"Yes."
"In what manner?"
"You believe him to be a man of noble birth—one of the great Verrasci family—but he is an impostor. He is not a Verrasci; the name and rank are assumed. He, like you, was born of peasant parentage; and he, like you, has a blot on the escutcheon of his past career."

"Monsieur, I care not!"
"You care not? Was it not the count you loved?"
"No."
"Whom?"
"The man."
"And you will wed the man—the son of peasant parents?"
"No, I will not wed him; I am unworthy."
"Not more unworthy than he. Your life has not been less blameless than his; circumstances were against you both. He is now a good and true man; you can become a good and true woman."

"These words from you, monsieur?"
"Yes, these words from me."
"Oh, what can be your purpose?"
"You shall hear from the count's own lips."
"I shall never see him."
"You will not see him?"
"Never!"
"Why not?"
"I shall not be made the victim of your mad revenge."
"Madame, I swear I am only studying your happiness."
"Impossible!"
"When you see the count and hear his tale from his own lips, you will understand."
"Are you really speaking sincerely?"
"I am."
"And when shall I see the count?"
"To-morrow, and he has a confession to make; no confession to listen to from you, as he, through some strange means, has learned your whole history."
"And still loves me?"
"Yes, he still loves you."
"Oh, this is but a mad dream!"
"No, no, madame. And now listen: I propose to prove my trust in you. I have the girl Lucille at my command."

"Yes."
"I shall leave her with you."
"After pursuing me for years?"
"Yes."
"Your reason?"
"I will prove the sincerity of my faith in you as a repentant woman."
"All this can not be true!"
"It is true."
"And now, madame, return to your true home, and to-morrow, under the broad light of day, I will send the count to your presence."

"You will not come with him?"
"We shall see."

CHAPTER XXXII.

The detective a few moments later took his departure, but before going he had said:

"Madame, promise me that you will not do yourself any harm, that you will see the count?"

"I will promise," was the answer.

Again the detective approached close to the princess and said:

"Great happiness is in store for you. Remember that you can believe my word."

"You need have no fear, monsieur; I shall be prepared to receive the count."

M. Armand fixed his eyes upon the woman and appeared to be satisfied. The wonderful Frenchman was indeed a wonderful reader of the human face, and he appeared content with what he discerned upon the face of the madame.

M. Armand proceeded to the hotel where Everard Galt lodged. He appeared to be particularly well pleased and happy. He found the Englishman in his room, and the two men talked over the events of the preceding few days, and at length the detective remarked, abruptly:

"I think you have had enough of America?"

Everard Galt looked surprised and demanded:

"What do you mean, monsieur?"
"My remark is an interrogatory."
"And how shall I answer you?"

"I will come right down to business. When you entered my service I promised that, if you served me well, you should be well paid. The service has been a short but an exciting one, and I am here to redeem my word."

"Proceed, monsieur."
"Have you any ungratified wish?"
"I have."
"If I had the capital I would go West and buy a large ranch; the life would suit me exactly; indeed it is the height of my ambition to own a ranch."

"How much capital will you need, sir?"
"I have been negotiating with a man, a countryman of mine, who will sell a well-stocked ranch for forty thousand dollars."

"And if you had forty thousand dollars you would buy it?"
"Yes."
"When would you start?"
"The moment I had the money."
"If I give you forty thousand dollars will you consider your services well paid for, sir?"
"I will."

"And if you receive the money can I be assured that you will always keep as a secret the incident that led to the payment of the money?"
"What am I to understand?"

"Listen: you are a man of honor; your word to me is as good as your bond. I wish you to promise me that you will never so long as you live mention any of the facts you know concerning Madaine Dubroski."

A smile played over Galt's face as he remarked in a significant tone:

"Ah, I see."
"What do you perceive?"
"You love the princess? I have suspected the fact."
"Yes, I love her."
"Ah, monsieur, you know your own business."
"I do."
"When will you marry her?"
"I told her of my love, but she received the announcement with scorn."
"Ah, but you have her in your power; you will compel her to marry you!"

"I shall never compel her to marry me; but my hopes and fears have nothing to do with my business with you."

"You wish me to hold forever as a secret any facts I may know concerning the princess?"
"Yes."
"And you are to give me forty thousand dollars?"
"Possibly, yes."
"Monsieur, listen to me; if you only paid me with thanks, I would as readily promise to obey your request."

"I believe you, sir! and now listen to me: to-morrow I will tell you a strange story, and afterward make good the promise I now make; your service to me has been well performed; I will present you with one hundred thousand dollars; you shall buy the ranch."

The Englishman could not conceal his astonishment and delight, and the two men indulged in a long and friendly talk.

Upon the day following the incidents we have described, the princess sat in her apartments surrounded by all the gorgeous collection of articles of *virtu* described in a preceding chapter. She was robed in splendid apparel, and looked like some Eastern princess who had been transported in some magic manner to New York.

As she sat there her beautiful lips parted, and murmured words fell from them.

"I shall soon know," she muttered—"soon know whether he means to play me false, or is indeed my friend. I do not hope; I believe it is all a well-planned scheme to flavor the pleasure of his revenge over me. But he shall not triumph. When last we met, I deceived him with my nice little acting with the dagger; but this time it will not be for me a play, but a real tragedy!"

As the princess spoke she drew from her pocket a small vial, and, continuing her soliloquy, said:

"This is death—quick and painless, and no hand can arrest mine when I have resolved to carry it to my lips. I await you, Monsieur Armand, and you may triumph; but your triumph shall be in my death only!"

At this moment the door opened, and there entered, from an adjoining room, a fair young girl.

"Ah, Lucille, you are here!"
"Yes, mamma."
"And you have really learned to love me, child?"
"Yes, I have learned to love you; since you have told me all your history a great change has come over my feeling toward you."

"And all these years you believed me the murderer of your father?"
"I did."
"How is it that you ever came to indulge such a suspicion?"
"You remember Nurse Olga?"
"Yes."
"She told me a terrible tale."
"And all these years you have kept the secret from me?"
"Yes."
"And I have always treated you kindly and lovingly?"
"Yes, mamma."
"And in spite of the aversion you always exhibited toward me?"
"Yes, mamma, because I believed you a murderer."
"And are you now satisfied that I am innocent?"
"Yes."
"But you have no proof, you have only my declaration of innocence?"
"And it is sufficient, since you told me your whole story; and now, mamma, can I speak plainly?"
"Yes."
"I fear something dreadful is about to happen."

A pallor overspread the lovely face of the princess.

"You fear something is about to happen?"
"Yes."
"What do you fear?"
"I dare not tell."
"Yes, child, tell me all you fear."
"I fear you mean harm to yourself, and I beg of you to listen to me; no matter what may happen, do not die; live for me! we will return to France; you love France, I love France, and there is now no reason why we should not live there in peace."

"You don't know all, child."
"I know that if you die I shall die also."
"But I have a desperate enemy who will never permit me to live in peace."

"Mamma, the man whom you consider your enemy is your best friend; wait and see; to-day shall prove an eventful one for us."

CHAPTER XXXIII.

WHEN Lucille uttered the words betraying a certain knowledge, the princess gazed at her in a startled manner.

"You say my enemy is a friend, child?"
"Yes, mamma."
"How dare you make this declaration?"
A moment the girl was silent.

"Have you talked with Monsieur Armand?"
"No."
"He is my enemy—my deadly enemy!"
"No, mamma, he is your friend."
"Child, what has come over you?"
"I have a confession to make to you."
"Confess."
"I have heard Monsieur Armand speak, I have gazed upon his face."
"Ah! you are a traitor to me!"
"No, mamma."
"You confess that you have talked with Monsieur Armand?"
"I confess only that I have heard him speak—I have seen his face."
"And you did not tell me?"
"I am telling you now."
"Yes, at the last moment."
"I must confess all."
"Please, do."
"I was a listener to the conversation between you and Monsieur Armand. I was in hiding, and I peeped into the room. I overheard his words. I was gazing upon his face while he spoke."

"Well."
"He said he was your friend."
"He said that to lull me to a sense of momentary security, so that he might better carry out his plan of revenge!"

"He does not desire to carry out any plan of revenge against you."

"How do you know?"
"He loves you."
"Nonsense!"
"Yes, mamma, he loves you. I was looking straight into his eyes when he said so. I heard him declare he was your friend. I believe him; you must believe him, also."

"No, no, child, you do not know these French detectives; they are deep and subtle."

me. That man will delight in carrying me back to Russia."

"Why will he delight in carrying you back to Russia?"

"He will win fame, wealth, titles."

"But why will he gain these through your return to Russia?"

"He will return me as the murderer of your father, and all the Dubroski wealth will escheat to the crown after I am executed as a murderer!"

"But, mamma, you are innocent."

"In truth, I am innocent, but the evidence is against me, and Monsieur Armand can manufacture and supply all that might be lacking to gain a conviction."

"But why should he claim to be your friend?"

"He desires to deceive me. Should he make an arrest, it would be a long time before I could be sent back to Russia. It is his purpose to gain my confidence and secretly transport me across the ocean. That man is not my friend, but I will defeat him."

"But this count whom you love?"

A terrible look of agony came into the woman's face; indeed a more ghastly and livid countenance was never betrayed by a living being.

Lucille gazed in terror and exclaimed:

"Oh, mamma, what is the matter? you look as though you were dying."

"I wish I were dead, child."

"And your face changed when I spoke of the count."

"Yes, yes, Lucille, I shall die; and now one word: when I am dead you must see the count and—and—"

The woman's voice failed her.

"And what, mamma?"

"Vindicate me; you know my history. I have told you, I have concealed nothing from you, and all that I have told you is the truth. You must vindicate me. When I am dead tell the count my sad tale; tell him how I loved him and tell him I was innocent but unfortunate; tell him all."

"But, mamma, why should you die? Why not tell your tale to the count with your own lips?"

"No, no, child, I never will; the presence of the count in this house is the signal for my death."

"Then he shall never come here. But, mamma, if you love him why do you fear him?"

"Lucille, listen: I am now satisfied the count suspected something concerning me during our intercourse at Baden-Baden. He frequently uttered strange remarks. At the time I did not suspect their meaning; but now I see all. Yes, yes, he suspected I was not what I seemed, and his last words were, 'When we meet again may you come to me as pure as the waters of yonder fountain and you shall become my wife.'

"And did he not mean what he said?"

"I believe he did."

"And you are innocent. Why should you fear to meet him?"

"Child, because of this terrible man, Monsieur Armand! He is my foe—a deadly enemy! He has seen and talked with the count. He has convinced the count that I am a murderer, and he has won the count over as an ally. I see it all—I am to be betrayed through my love, and Verraci, acting as the ally of Armand, is to be my betrayer!"

"Oh, mamma, if you are right, how terrible!"

"I know I am right, my child."

"And you have promised to see the Count Verraci?"

"Yes."

"If you know he is only coming here in order to betray you, why do you see him?"

"I have nothing to live for now!" came the response in tones so sad that tears coursed down the cheeks of the beautiful Lucille.

"What do you intend to do, mamma?"

"I intend to meet the count, learn his purpose, upbraid him and die!"

"No, no! you must not see him! you must not die! What will become of me?"

"You will be well cared for, my child, no matter what may happen to me."

"But, mamma, I have learned to love you. I always yearned to love you, but always before my eyes yawned the chasm pictured by Nurse Olga; but now I know you are innocent—I know you are a wronged woman, and I love you. No, no you must not die!"

"Lucille, if you really love me, you will not let me to live; would you desire to see me car-

ried to Russia in chains, and publicly executed?"

"Mamma, you are not in Russia; you are in America, and they can not force you to return."

"Ah, that man will manage, sooner or later, to carry me back to Russia. He is a terrible enemy, and even now I see what a deep-laid scheme he has perfected to ruin me!"

"But, mamma, suppose Monsieur Armand told you the truth—suppose he is really your friend?"

"Impossible, child! I might have made him my friend, but I would rather die a hundred times than accept the love of that cold-blooded monster!"

"It's strange, mamma," murmured Lucille.

"What is strange?"

"It is strange you should look upon Monsieur Armand as a monster. I think he has a noble face, a kindly face! I believe there was truth and sincerity in his voice when he said he was your friend."

"Ah, child, you do not know him! you do not know how relentlessly that man has pursued me! No, no, he is not my friend, but the bitterest enemy a mortal ever contended against!"

"Mamma, make me one promise!"

"Well?"

"Promise me you will not harm yourself, until—" the girl stopped.

"Until what, child?"

"Until after you have seen the count."

"Lucille, I promise!"

CHAPTER XXXIV.

M. ARMAND was alone in his room in that same house where he had faced Everard Galt on the night when the latter had been inveigled by the woman who tragically rushed from the carriage on Fifth Avenue.

The French detective paced to and fro across the floor of the room; his face was less colorless than usual, and there was a bright gleam in his eyes. He appeared to be lost in deep meditation, and occasionally his thoughts found audible utterance:

"Can I believe that woman? or has love made a fool of me? Alas! I dare not trust myself; it may be that, after all, I am blind, and she may be the cruel, heartless, cold-blooded poisoner I once believed her!"

He ceased speaking, and paused for a long time in silence, but at length resumed his soliloquy, and said:

"After all, I can not blame her for seeking to destroy me; and knowing what manner of man I am, she was even justified in adopting any means to get rid of me. Could I only explain away her compact with Galt! She might have tempted that young man on to his death, and that would have been murder!"

The detective's soliloquy was interrupted by the entrance of a man. The new-comer was one of the finest specimens of physical manhood that ever crossed the threshold of a friend.

"Well, monsieur, you're acting the sentinel's part, I see."

"Ah, friend Balfour, as usual, you come unannounced. My master, I bid you welcome!"

The new-comer was Ned Balfour, the famous giant detective. M. Armand and the American had formed a friendship in Paris, and when the Frenchman arrived in America the first man he sought was Ned, and the latter had been of great service to him during his sojourn in New York. Indeed, it was the American who had given him many of his best points, and it was the American who supplied all the aids when needed, including the beautiful decoy who had come the little trick over Galt.

M. Armand was a long-headed, skillful man, and he had great confidence in the judgment of Ned Balfour, as he knew the American to be a really true and sincere man.

"What is the occasion of this tramp, tramp?"

"How do you know I've been tramping?"

"I've been in the house a couple of hours. I found you tramping when I came in, and you've been tramping ever since, and I thought it was now about time to let the other fellow do the walking, so I came in on you."

"I'm glad you did, and I wish you had come in sooner."

"Something on your mind?"

"Yes."

"Can I help you?"

"Yes."

"I'm your man."

"I am in the greatest of trouble; indeed I am more perplexed than ever before in all my life."

"Monsieur Armand is generally the man to get out of trouble."

"Ah! this is a peculiar trouble."

"All right; open up and I will see what I can do for you."

"I've a confession to make."

"Eh?" ejaculated the American.

"I've a confession to make."

"Pitch in, old man; I've listened to many of them."

"I have to confess, in the first place, that I am a fool."

"That's a good way to start off; when a man discovers that he's a fool, he's generally at the starting-point for becoming a sensible man."

"I am afraid, though, that I am about to make a bigger fool of myself."

"Then you are right in seeking advice, and I'm a good adviser."

"Ned, I'm in love."

"The devil!"

"Well, that's good. I do not know but you have spoken the truth unwittingly."

"Ah! a female devil!"

"Possibly the truth again."

"Well, let's have it all out, old boy."

"I'm in love with the princess."

"Are you?"

"I am."

There was a peculiar expression upon the American's face, as he said:

"That's no news."

"No news?"

"No."

"You were aware of it?"

"Certainly."

"I thought I could keep a secret better."

"Love is a hard secret to hold, I got tripped up on that once myself. Hang it! I'd rather trace down a dozen criminals than fall in love once—it knocks a fellow all endways!"

"Knowing that I love the princess, you have still associated with me as a friend?"

"Yes."

"Then you like the company of fools?"

"No; but I consider it the most natural thing in the world that you should fall in love with that magnificent woman."

"You call her a magnificent woman?"

"Yes; one of the grandest women I ever met."

"But a criminal."

"Is she?"

"You have heard her history?"

"From you, yes; but you have not yet proved anything against her."

"Do you think it possible she can be an innocent woman?"

"I would rather believe her innocent than guilty."

"Ned Balfour, you make my heart glad."

"How so?"

"I place more confidence in your judgment than in that of any man living."

"Thank you."

"If you can admit the possibility of her innocence, she is innocent."

"Between you and me, it has run through my mind all along that she might be 'more sinned against than sinning."

M. Armand related all the princess had said in her own defense. The American listened attentively, and when the narrative was concluded, said:

"I am prepared to believe her statement."

"Why are you so willing to believe in her innocence?"

"You have yourself related to me certain acts of goodness she has performed, and upon one or two occasions I have had the honor and pleasure of watching her when she did not know she was observed."

"Well?"

"I came to the conclusion, as I told you, that I believed it was possible that she was 'more sinned against than sinning!'

"And you would not discourage my strange love for her?"

"Certainly not; but it will be a strange thing if she can love Monsieur Armand."

"Why?"

"She must associate your name and person with every terror that has haunted her soul for the last few years."

"Possibly so."

"Have you told her you loved her?"

"Yes."

"And what did she say?"

"Just what I expected."

"She scorned you?"

"No."
"Eh?"
"No; she told me she loved another."
"Ah, that settles your case! that woman, good or bad, can only really love but once!"
"You think so?"
"Yes."
"And yet she shall love me!"
Ned Balfour smiled, but said nothing; he did not wish to hurt the feelings of his friend.
"She'll marry me, Ned."
"Oh, certainly, you can compel her to marry you, innocent or guilty; Monsieur Armand holds her life in his hands!"
"But I shall not take advantage of my position in that manner."
"What will you do?"
"Teach her to love me."
"Ban!" laughed Ned.

CHAPTER XXXV.

M. ARMAND took the little jeer of his friend in good part, and said:

"I have a surprise for you, but in the meantime you have done me a great service in teaching me to believe in Agatha's innocence." "I may do you still another favor and a better one."

"Proceed."

"The lady told you she loved another?"

"Yes."

"Then say no more about your own love, or you will be led into the performance of some unmanly deed."

"You do not know me."

"I know that love makes fools of wise men."

"It shall not make a fool of me."

"I've nothing more to say."

Upon the same day that the conversation occurred between the princess and Lucille, indeed, at the same hour, our hero was holding a conference with Everard Galt.

M. Armand appeared anxious to assure himself on one point, and after a general talk, he said:

"Everard, I wish to ask you a question."

The Englishman nodded his head.

"What is your idea of the princess?"

"I believe she is a wonderful woman."

"Do you believe it is possible that she can be an innocent woman?"

"Why do you ask me?"

The Frenchman fixed his eyes on the Englishman, and said:

"You once wooed her?"

"And did not win her?"

"She played you false."

"I forgive her."

"You do?"

"Yes."

"Why?"

The woman believed herself persecuted and pursued; she was acting in self-defense."

"But suppose you had been killed?"

"She did not mean I should be killed. She assured herself that I was an expert swordsman. She had been led to believe that I was a better man than you. But, under any circumstances, I forgive her."

"And could you love her now?"

The color came into Everard's face, but he answered, promptly:

"I could; but I think you are driving this talk beyond the bounds of friendship."

"I will say no more."

* * * *

The princess had said to Lucille, "I will promise," and the girl had answered:

"I am satisfied, mamma, that great happiness is in store for you."

"No, no, child, it can not be."

"I am assured."

"Why are you so assured?"

"I had a dream after Monsieur Armand went away last night."

"A dream? Well, child, my life has been a dream, a hideous dream, and I have been haunted by a terrible nightmare waking and sleeping."

"You are to learn that Monsieur Armand is a noble man."

"No, Lucille, it is not possible. I know more of Monsieur Armand than you do. The man delights in having run me down, and it is a part of his devilish scheme to win me in the horrible manner peculiar to some Frenchmen. It will, indeed, be the triumph of his life, the great detection *par excellence*, to betray me through the man I love."

"I do not believe you are to be betrayed. Monsieur Armand has promised to bring the Count Verrasci to your side. He told you the count knew your history, and yet will come. Make up your mind that a great surprise is in store for you."

"And how will I be surprised?"

"You will learn that Monsieur Armand, while seeming to be your enemy, has, indeed, been your friend."

"Never, never!—the man is a fiend!"

"He is an angel!"

"Lucille!"

"Yes; the man who could give his time to rescue me must be an angel!"

"Ah, you are thinking of yourself!"

"No; I am thinking only of you."

"Monsieur Armand is a devil!"

"And the devil is here!" came a voice; and the next instant M. Armand entered the room.

Again Agatha's face assumed a deathly hue. She knew that the crisis in her fate approached, and a terror filled her soul. She glanced behind the detective expecting to see one with him.

The detective interpreted her glance, and said:

"I am alone. But why that look of terror upon your face?"

"Monsieur, is it strange my face should assume a terrified look in your presence?"

"Do you so fear me?"

"Have I not cause to fear you?"

"Have I ever done you harm? Just think over all I have ever done to you?"

"Monsieur, you have made my life a terror, a burden; but for you I could be happy; now I am miserable; indeed, my life is a curse!"

Lucille had withdrawn from the room immediately upon the entrance of the detective.

"I have been your friend. Did you not send Monsieur Galt to assassinate me, and did I not spare his life? Suppose I had killed him?"

"Ah, you spared him for a purpose."

"A purpose?"

"Yes; you made him your tool."

"How about the Count Verrasci?"

The woman glared, but did not speak.

"Did I breathe a word to him concerning you?"

"Monsieur, listen to me—I know your game."

"You know my game?"

"Yes."

"What is my game?"

"It is worthy of you; but I will defeat you."

"But what is my game?"

"Verrasci has become your tool also."

"You think so?"

"I know it."

"I thought you loved Verrasci?"

"He has turned against me under malign influence. He has also become my tool."

"Have you ceased to love him?"

"I have."

"Then I am deceived. I led the count to believe that you loved him still."

And it is through that love, and with the count's, that you intended to betray me; but listen—you shall never succeed. You have arranged all your plans; I have strangled mine."

"Agatha, I am not your enemy."

"You can never convince me that you are not."

"I never was."

"Then why have you pursued me?"

"I believed you to be a criminal."

"And now?"

"I know you are an innocent woman."

"How do you know I am an innocent woman?"

"I have your word for the fact."

"And do you accept my word, my simple word?"

"Yes."

"This is very strange."

"Yes; it seems strange to me, and yet I am prepared to say that at this moment I believe you more sinned against than sinning."

"And what does the count believe?"

"He believes the same."

"Monsieur, dare you solemnly swear you are not my foe?"

"I swear."

"Swear that you are telling me the truth and not seeking to deceive me and lure me on to death?"

"I swear."

"And you expect me to believe you?"

"I expect you to accept my word as I have yours."

"And you have accepted mine?"

"Yes."

"You absolutely believe in my innocence?"

"I do."

"And the count, does he believe in it?"

"He shares in my belief."

CHAPTER XXXVI.

A BRIGHT smile broke over Agatha's face for a moment, and she said:

"Are you speaking truly?"

"I am."

The shadow came again, and she murmured

"No, no, there can come no such happiness for me."

"I swear the count believes in your innocence."

"Yes, it is a part of your profession to mislead. Where is the count?"

"He is at hand."

"Let him come and answer for himself."

"And will you believe him?"

"I will not answer now."

"You remember when you and the count parted?"

"I do."

"He split a ring with you?"

"He did."

"Have you your half of the ring?"

"Yes."

"Let me see it."

Agatha drew the little half of the ring from her locket, where she had kept it clasped about her neck.

"Ah, you kept it next your heart?"

"I did."

"And you could still believe the count could be false to you?"

"I believe, sir, you could transform an angel into a demon!"

"You will not change your opinion of me?"

"I can not."

"You never will? Can you be so bitter toward one who loves you, and still surrenders you to the Count Verrasci?"

The woman did not make answer.

"Possibly you doubt the presence of the count in New York?"

The woman remained silent.

The detective put forth his hand to take the half of the ring. The woman drew it away.

"You will not trust it to me?"

"No."

"How bitter you are!"

"Toward you, yes."

"And you will never overcome that bitterness?"

"Never!"

"See here."

The detective held toward her half of a ring.

"The count has sent this to you."

The woman turned deathly pale, and her eyes emitted fire.

"What does this mean?" she tremblingly demanded.

"You remember the count's words?"

"Do you know what he said?"

"He told you that if he ever offered the half of the ring to you, and permitted you to join the two halves, it was a sign that he believed you pure, and that his love was ever yours."

"He did not make the promise upon the condition of sending the ring to me."

"No."

"Is that the half that belongs to this?"

"It is. Try it."

The woman was greatly agitated; but she fitted the two halves and turned and faced the detective.

"What does this all mean?" she demanded in low tones, her voice thick with huskiness.

"What do you suspect?"

"I suspect nothing."

"No suspicion has ever crossed your mind?"

In steady tones Agatha said:

"The count is dead."

"No, he lives."

"Then he is a false man."

"Why is he false?"

"Had he been true, he would never have intrusted this to you, of all men my bitterest foe. Can it be possible he did not know you were my enemy?"

"He knows all."

The woman's agitation was intense. It was an exciting moment. The detective stood with his eyes fixed upon the woman; the latter looked up and caught the thrilling glance.

"Oh, mercy!" she exclaimed, "what does this all mean?"

"And do you not suspect? Look behind you."

The detective spoke in a tragic tone and with a tragic gesture. The woman instinctively turned. Her face was turned away but an instant, and when she glanced back a scream issued from her lips.

A moment she stood trembling like an aspen leaf, her eyes dilated and her face convulsed.

At length she found voice to demand:

"What does this mean? Oh, mercy, mercy! cruel, cruel fate, what does this mean?"

The detective, transformed into the Count Verrasci, stood with his glittering eyes fixed upon her, and in low tones he said:

"It means, Agatha, that I love you."

"Verrasci and Monsieur Armand one and the same!—or is this some wonderful trick, or do I dream?"

"You do not dream; it is true. Remember the words I was to speak to you when the ring was joined; join it, and I will speak."

"And do you believe in me?"

"I do."

"And you know all?"

"I know all; and it is strange to me that you never suspected."

"I never did; your disguise was perfect."

"And you desire an explanation?"

"I do."

"First tell me can you still love the Count Verrasci; or, resting as I do under the shadow of Monsieur Armand, will you hate me?"

"Can I trust your love?"

"You can."

"Oh, this seems too much—too great happiness!"

A smile broke over the detective's face, and he said:

"Those are kind words; they bid me hope."

"And do you really love me?"

"Had I not loved you my mask would never have been removed; you never would have seen the Count Verrasci again on earth."

The face of the princess became illuminated with joy; the detective recognized how happy she was, and his own heart was filled with joy. He was a strange man, had led a lonely life, and, when once he loved, it became a sentiment of deeper intensity than ordinary men experience.

A few words passed. The identification became perfect, and, at length Agatha said:

"Will you explain the mystery to me?"

"I will, and in very few words. I followed you to Baden-Baden as Monsieur Armand. I had tracked you step by step. I looked upon you as a criminal, and it was at Baden-Baden where the bright thought first pierced my mind that there was a possibility that you were an in-

nocent woman, and from that moment I set myself to establish your innocence and not your guilt, and it was then that I learned to love. I tried to resist the passion, but in vain. I had introduced myself to you as Count Verrasci; the countship was merely a professional disguise, and as Count Verrasci I won your love, and in fair and open combat disposed of the man who had assailed you."

Other explanations followed, but sufficient has been recorded to open up the matter to our readers.

M. Armand and the princess became fully reconciled, and we may add that, after all, it was a gratification to Agatha to learn that Armand and Verrasci were one and the same. She was a bright, smart woman, and she knew the detective to be one of the brightest men of his time. She loved him as Verrasci, and her love became even more intense when she learned he was Armand.

Our hero made good his word to Galt, and a few weeks following M. and Mme. Armand sailed for France, and it is upon record that the detective once playfully said to his beautiful wife:

"I refused half your fortune because I desired it all and the possessor thrown in; and when monsieur starts in to win, the game is fixed."

THE END.

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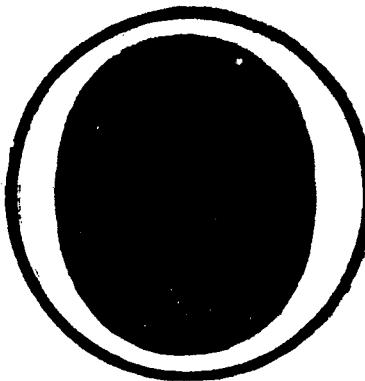
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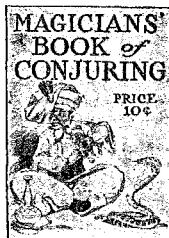
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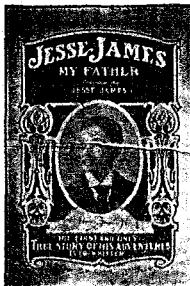
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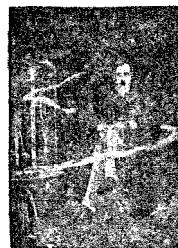
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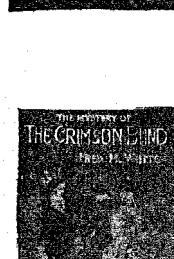
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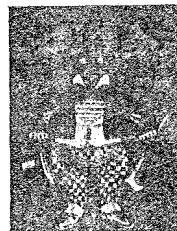


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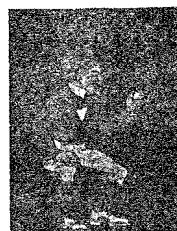
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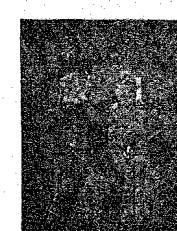
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